



THE LADYE DANCYE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'DAME DURDEN'





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By John F. Dune
Sept 1st 1887

'THE LADYE NANCYE.'

A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

'DAME DURDEN,' 'MY LORD CONCEIT,'

'DARBY AND JOAN,'

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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'THE LADYE NANCYE.'

BOOK V.—*Continued.*

'BROKEN LINKS.'

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. FREERE'S JOURNAL.

February 20th. — How slowly the weary days roll on! Storm and darkness without, and fear and sorrow within. We hear the wind howling round the old house in these long, desolate nights; the thunder of the sea throbs like a dull echo through the air.

Old Deborah goes about sadly and with trembling limbs, for her husband is dying, and only one servant, an elderly woman who cooks and attends to the few rooms in use,

stays in the house. The younger girls left a week ago, declaring the place is haunted, and I have not had the heart to see about getting others.

I think the change in Basil grieves me more than anything else. He is pale, gloomy, anxious, and restless ; changed out of all likeness to the bright, merry, mischievous boy of two years ago.

The unwholesome atmosphere of this life weighs upon us all. I feel stifled, enervated, morbid. All exertion seems an effort, and day drifts after day, and only in some chance hour like the present do I ask myself, ' Is it always to be so ?'

February 21st.—Midnight in the lonely house. Again I sit here writing ; again do I see the slight, frail figure in the adjoining room wrapped in deep slumber. It is all very silent, and very still.

Sometimes, it seems to me, I see moving

shadows flitting to and fro, and hear strange rustlings and noises in the corridors without. I rouse myself with an effort. I know that even my strong nerves are beginning to feel the effects of this long strain of anxiety, this dreary life of repression and watchfulness. . . . My pen has been tracing only idle lines ; a strange sense of drowsiness oppresses me. It seems no use writing in my journal to-night. I think I will go to bed.

Two o'clock. I heard a clock strike. I found myself still sitting here ; the pen was by my side. I think I must have fallen asleep. The fire is low, the lamp burns dimly. I will close this, give a last look at Nancette, and then—to bed.

* * * * *

How long ago was it that I left off writing ? Weeks, days, hours ? I can hardly tell.

I only know it is night again, and that all is

quiet and still, and my throbbing head is at rest at last. I only know that my eyes are wet with tears—that thought, and sense, and feeling are merged into sudden peace.

And what has caused it? Let me try, now that calmness and reason have returned, to put down the series of events a few brief hours have brought about.

I woke up, as is written here, from a short spell of sleep. I shut up my journal, stirred the smouldering fire into a blaze, and then turned to go into Nancette's room, as was my usual custom before I sought my own bed. I started. The dividing door between her room and mine had been wide open, so that from my writing-table I could see her as she slept. Now it was nearly closed. In a second I was across the threshold, and had thrown it back. The bed was empty!

I think for a moment or two I felt paralysed with fear. I remembered I had locked the door leading from my own room into the

corridor, and had placed the key on the table. I rushed back. It was gone ! Turning swiftly to the door, I saw it there in the lock. In a second I had snatched up the lamp, and was hurrying downstairs. The great door was bolted and barred. Evidently she had not gone out by that way. I rushed into our usual sitting-room. The shutters were barred. There had been no egress from there. I paused for a moment, doubtful whether I should wake Basil or prosecute the search myself. Suddenly I remembered the old school-room. The window was low, and opened on the kitchen-garden. The boys had often and often made use of it to escape into the grounds. I hurried there. As I opened the door a gust of wind nearly extinguished my lamp. The window was wide open.

Convinced then that Nancette must have gone out by that way, I rushed upstairs once more and awoke Basil. In a few moments

he had hurried on some clothes, and we both ran down into the school-room. The sky was bright and clear; there was sufficient light to show us the gardens, and the paths, and the dark belt of quiet woods beyond.

'Perhaps she is in the avenue as usual,' said Basil. 'Let us go there first. But we ought to have a lantern.'

'There is one in the housekeeper's room,' I said. 'I will get it directly.'

He followed me, and lit it, and then we hurried out into the grounds, throwing the light here and there as we went along, starting nervously at sound or shadow, but both convinced of the same idea that we should find Nancette in the avenue.

Suddenly, as the drive curved round beneath the shadowy elms, I caught sight of a white figure a little in advance. It was moving at a swift, uniform pace, and involuntarily the same cry escaped us both: 'It is she!'

'Don't let us frighten her,' said Basil in a low, hurried voice. 'It is the same idea. She will go to the gates and watch.'

Keeping her well in view, we followed.

She went as usual towards the lodge. Before reaching it, however, she turned and stood as if listening. We also remained motionless. I saw then that her eyes were open, and had a strained, anxious look. I whispered to Basil to advance and speak. He moved forward a few paces. She held up her hand as if to stay him.

'Hush !' she said, 'I am listening for him. He will soon be here.'

'He will not come to-night,' said the boy gently. 'Come home now, Ladye Nancye ; it is too cold for you to be out.'

Usually she obeyed him like a child. To-night she stood immovable.

'He is coming,' she repeated. 'I hear him !'

Basil looked at me. I did not know what

to do. There was something new and determined about her to-night. We both drew back a little, and watched her. She never moved, only stood there intent, still, earnest. A moment or two passed. Then with a low, strange cry she rushed to the gates and drew back the lock and flung one of them open. At the same instant a dark figure appeared in the entrance. Basil sprang forward. The light of the lantern flashed on the bent shoulders, the haggard, grief-lined face of—Errol Glendenning.

Stupefied with amazement I stood there, but Nancette threw herself at his feet and caught his hands in both her own.

'You have come,' she cried, 'at last—at last—at last! I knew you would. I watched for you every day.'

He staggered back against the iron gates. His face looked ghastly and bloodless in the pale gray light of the breaking dawn.

'*You!*' he cried.

That was all. No word of welcome, or relief, or surprise, greeted her return to life.

She rose slowly to her feet, and looked at him with wide, sorrowful eyes.

'Will you not forgive me,' she said, 'now that I am dead? For you may be happy again, but I—I can never be happy any more!'

Then Basil took the piteous, outstretched hands and drew her to his side.

'For Heaven's sake,' he said passionately, 'don't be stern and cold to her! Wait till you hear her story.'

Then I found voice and movement, too, and came forward to the strange group.

'Errol,' I said hurriedly, 'you are thrice welcome. But come to the house at once. Don't waste time here. We have so much to tell you.'

He left the gate then, and it fell to with a loud clang. He did not look at, or speak to

Nancette, but came straight to me. I saw then how terribly ill he looked, how feebly he walked.

'She is alive, then?' he said.

'Yes,' I answered. 'Have you not had my letters? Don't you know——'

'I know nothing,' he said, and suddenly leant upon my arm as if to stay his trembling limbs.

'I have been very ill,' he said. 'I was taken ill in Paris with rheumatic fever. I saw your advertisement in *Galignani*, and came here as soon as I could move. I—I did not dream of——'

He shuddered and glanced at the white figure by Basil's side.

'Come away,' I whispered; 'don't for pity's sake speak coldly or cruelly to her now!'

I drew him away. I knew Basil could manage Nancette better than I could.

'What is it?' asked Errol. 'Her words

were so strange. She looks so different ; like—like a sleep-walker, I thought.'

'I don't know how to tell you,' I sobbed, for strength and sense seemed deserting me. 'Her brain is not—not quite right. The shock—the grief——'

He seized my arm. He turned his white, agonized face to mine.

'Good Heaven !' he cried hoarsely. 'Do you know what you imply? Is she—mad?'

I looked back. I saw the slight form clinging so helplessly and dejectedly to Basil's strong young arm. In terror lest she should hear, I urged Errol forward.

'No, no,' I cried, 'not mad ; but her mind is unhinged—astray. She is like a child. She remembers nothing of the past.'

'But she was here—waiting. She remembered me!'

'Oh,' I cried, half weeping, 'how can I tell you! She fancies herself dead, and that she is the woman in the picture—the Ladye

Nancye of the old Glendenning story, you know.'

'And this,' he said, his voice low, restrained, but with an under-tone of fierceness almost terrible to me in its strangeness and wrath—'this is what you urged me to come home for! This is the mercy that raised me from my sick-bed, and led me back to life!'

'Oh, Errol—don't!'

It was all I could say, for a storm of weeping shook me, and the tears rained down my cheeks, despite my efforts at self-control.

He saw I was unnerved and upset, and so was silent as we hurried up the dreary avenue in the chill dawn. We did not speak again until we reached the house, and were all together in the old schoolroom.

The only light was from the lantern Basil carried. He placed it on the table, and I approached Nancette.

'Come with me!' I said gently. 'You

are cold and shivering. Let us go to our own room.'

She threw back the white fleecy wrapper from her head and shoulders. Her great, mournful eyes turned wistfully to Errol.

'You have come back,' she said, 'but not to forgive. She said you would never forgive, even if I were dead. But it is cruel; the dead harm no one!'

He sank back in a chair, ghastly and trembling.

'For Heaven's sake,' he moaned, 'take her away! I cannot bear it!'

I put my arm around her, and drew her from the room. Basil followed us to the door.

'Don't leave her,' he whispered; 'I will tell him all.'

He has heard it all now. The whole pitiful, sorrowful tale has been told. Worn out with illness, and fatigue, and long-borne suffering, he has sought his room at last.

Nancette lies here peacefully asleep.

The worst has come, I know, yet a great weight seems lifted off my heart. Anxiety and suspense are over. The day has dragged its weary hours along till night again has fallen, and all the day Nancette has scarcely moved or spoken. She is like one in a half-sleep. I have scarcely left her for a single hour. She has never spoken of Errol, or of last night; but I cannot rouse her or get her to take any food, or show any interest in what is going on around. Her brain seems dazed and stupefied. I am thankful Errol does not ask to see her.

As yet, no hopeful results have accrued from his return; but when I think he is here—actually under the same roof—a great weight and fear seem lifted off my heart; the gloom and terror flee away; I say to myself: 'All may yet be well. Ah, Heaven grant it—Heaven grant it!'

CHAPTER V.

February 21st.—Errol and I have had a solemn discussion this evening.

Of one thing he is not convinced, and that is, that Nancette's disappearance had nothing to do with Pierre de Volens. The French detective had made a great error—it was a very likely one to fall into—but, nevertheless, he had led Errol on a false scent which culminated in his illness in Paris.

The shock of seeing her here in his own house, after those long, cruel months of suspicion, was very terrible. A great pity and tenderness for the unfortunate girl have taken the place of the old bitterness. I think if she were to recover——

He says that is hopeless. Her mind has gone. She is not mad or insane. Only she is like a child. Something is missing in the delicate mechanism of the brain—something that cannot be recalled or replaced.

For two days now she has lain in this semi-conscious state, noticing nothing, remembering nothing ; only lying there white and still, like a statue of marble, with closed eyes and scarcely-breathing lips.

It was after we had been watching her for a long, long time, that Errol and I went into the little boudoir adjoining her bedroom, and had our talk.

'She looks to me like one in a trance,' he said. 'I saw a woman once under the influence of mesmerism. That was just how she looked.'

I felt somewhat uncomfortable.

'You know,' I said, 'about the mysterious woman who had so strange an influence over her ?'

'Yes,' he said ; 'Basil told me. And I am inclined to support his theory. That woman alone can cure her. The question is, would she do it ?'

'I am inclined to think not,' I said. 'Her influence or power was only exerted on her own behalf.'

He gave a somewhat melancholy smile.

'Basil has been studying my books,' he said. 'I once—in years that are past—went in deeply for mystic science—the secrets of psychical nature. I had to give it up at last, because I fancied it affected my mind. I don't like Basil taking it up. The boy is completely changed.'

'But,' I said, in surprise, 'do you really believe in spirits, and mesmerism, and clairvoyance, and all those extraordinary things ?'

'I believe,' he said, 'in the existence of spirits, just as I do in the immortality of the soul. And it is absurd to set limits to the degrees of Nature. To certain students she

reveals more than to others. The patient, the humble, the investigating, learn more than the scoffer and the self-confident. I have always regarded this world and our life in it as merely preparatory to a far more interesting and marvellous life to follow. The deeper mysteries enfolding that life are not clearly revealed—a sort of unwillingness and terror stay the footsteps of investigation on its very threshold. Here and there we have glimpses of it, but always they are divulged with a certain shame and reluctance, and received with incredulity or scoffing. So we learn but little.'

I was silent for a few moments.

'Did you know,' I asked, 'that Nancette seems to have had a presentiment of your coming? I left her sound asleep last night, and when I woke I found her gone. She must have got up and dressed and gone downstairs in the dark, and found her way to the schoolroom, then opened the window, and

gone out to meet you. That does not look as if she were unaccountable for her actions. Something must have impelled her, and very strongly too. And you remember her greeting, just as if she had expected you ?

'Yes,' he said, while the old troubled look came into his eyes ; 'I could not understand it at the time. I cannot imagine why she should have thought of me at all.'

'She was always thinking of you,' I said, 'before this happened. Has Basil shown you the letters of Léonie St. Jean ?'

'No,' he said. 'Is that the daughter of his French master ?'

'The grand-daughter,' I answered, and an uncomfortable feeling stole over me. I had forgotten for a moment who her father was. I rose from my seat. 'I will call Basil,' I said, 'and ask for the letters. They are very curious.'

What I am about to relate is so singular

and strange that, but for the evidence of my own eyes, I should not myself believe it. I write it down here exactly as it happened.

I had sought Basil, and he at once gave me the letters I asked for, adding only one caution :

‘Don’t read them in *her* room.’

I have described the situation of Nancette’s bed-chamber, and how it opened into mine ; mine again opened into a small boudoir, which we had fitted up and used since our recent return to Owl’s Roost.

It was in this boudoir I and Errol sat, he reading the letters, I gazing idly and thoughtfully into the fire. The room was half in light, half in shadow. The door opening into my bedroom was curtained by heavy velvet *portières*. I had closed it on re-entering the boudoir, and sat now with my back turned towards it. A piano stood in the opposite corner, and in the darkest part of the room. Basil, after giving me the letters, had followed

me in, and was sitting at the piano, softly striking chords from time to time. It seemed as if some ten or fifteen minutes had passed, when something—a sound, a feeling quite unaccountable, impelled me suddenly to look round. Startled and amazed, I saw Nancette standing in the doorway. One hand held back the velvet *portières*, the other was pressed against her forehead. The faint cry I gave made Errol look up. Basil was still playing. He had heard nothing. Errol stayed the words on my lips with a gesture.

‘Don’t you see,’ he whispered, ‘she is asleep!’

For a moment she stood there, and in the same attitude. Her eyes were wide open, and yet they held no consciousness or recognition. Her hand still pressed her brow. Then suddenly it dropped. She looked round wildly—affrightedly.

‘I am here!’ she cried out. ‘What do you want with me?’

Basil sprang to his feet. He would have rushed to her side, but Errol held him back. She came forward a few steps.

'Don't ask me to cross the water,' she said. 'It is all so dark, so wild, so deep!' and, shuddering from head to foot, she sank down on a low couch in the middle of the room, and buried her face in her hands. Errol rose then, and approached her.

'I will speak to her,' he said.

A few paces off he stopped.

'Where are you?' he asked gently.

'See, she comes!' she said. 'She has called me there; I must obey. Oh, how dark it is! How the water roars!'

'Who is there?' resumed Errol.

'The woman is there; she has need of me, she says. I must go to a great city; I must bring her news of one who has wronged her. Oh, I cannot go—I will not! Keep me here; do not let her have me! Basil—Basil—where is Basil?'

'Stay!' said Errol sternly, as the boy moved forward; 'not yet! I must hear more.'

'You are torturing her!' Basil cried fiercely. 'She is in the power of that fiend. Ah!' with a cry of horror, 'look—she is dead!'

'She is not dead,' said Errol, advancing.

The girl's head had fallen back against the cushions; her eyes closed. She lay quite still, like a child asleep. She looked so lovely and so pure that he could not gaze on her unmoved. I saw his lips tremble; a rush of colour swept up to his brow. He drew back a few steps, resting his hand against a chair, as if to steady himself. Presently he spoke again.

'Where are you now?' he asked.

Her voice came faint and indistinct:

'I am—there! I see wide streets, and rows of trees, and great white buildings. There are crowds of people hurrying to and fro. Ah!'—and she shuddered convulsively

—'I see him at last. He has entered a house; an old man is with him.'

'Can you tell me the name of the man you see?' asked Errol.

'It is Pierre,' she said faintly. 'The old man calls him D'Orsay. They are in a room now. There are tables there, and cards, and money—piles of money. They are all playing. He sits down and plays too.'

Her utterance grew confused and indistinct. There was silence for a moment or two.

'What do you want of him?' she asked suddenly. 'No—no; he will not come. . . . Ah, the cave—the cave again! I cannot stay—I will not stay! I must go home! Errol has come—my husband! See, he is waiting for me. Let me go—oh, let me go—let me go!'

Her voice rose higher in each appeal. With that last wild cry, her whole frame shook as in convulsive throes. She seemed

struggling to free herself from some physical restraint. Her eyes opened, but they were terrible in their glassy, fixed stare.

I shuddered as I looked.

'Can't you do anything?' I asked Errol in agony.

He shook his head.

'Not while she is under that other influence,' he said. 'It would kill her.'

Gradually she grew quiet; her eyes closed; her breathing became regular. We stood and watched her anxiously.

'The power of that woman is singularly strong,' said Errol thoughtfully. 'At this distance, with nothing to remind her of her existence——'

'The letters!' cried Basil suddenly. 'You forget them. I told you she always knows when I receive one with any information respecting that woman. Let me take them from the room, and you'll see she will recover.'

He gathered up the scattered sheets which had fallen on the floor, and slipped quietly out of the room. As the outer door closed on him, Nancette gave a deep sigh and opened her eyes. She looked round in bewilderment.

'I have had a bad dream,' she said.

Then she started to her feet and threw herself into Errol's arms, clinging to him convulsively.

'Don't let me go,' she cried; 'she is calling me now. She says I must come. But you can keep me. I am yours—your wife, your love. Oh, say you won't let me go—say you won't let me go!'

Her voice broke into wild sobs. She clung to him like one in desperate extremity.

And he—ah, thank Heaven!—he gently soothed the terrified brain, he tenderly unclasped the clinging arms, and murmured gentle words, that stole to her ear like music, and calmed her fears, and left her quiet, peace-

ful, happy as a little child who is conscious of love and pardon.

Then he bore her in his arms to her own room, and so left her to my care.

A few hours later she was raving in the delirium of fever.

CHAPTER VI.

March 2nd, 10 p.m.—For a whole week I have written nothing in my journal, for Nancette has been so terribly ill that I feared she would never recover. Errol telegraphed for a physician from London, a specialist in brain cases ; but he seemed very doubtful of the results of the fever. Night and day he shared the watch over the poor, distraught girl.

Seven long, weary days and nights have come and gone, their hours filled with terrible ravings or more terrible exhaustion.

To-night a change has come. She lies wrapped in deep slumber, and I sit alone watching her. To while away the time I

have brought out my journal and have been idly turning its pages over, and reading its various extracts.

What a strange story they make up! I think to myself, 'If this was in a book, who would believe it?'

A moan from Nancette. I lay down my pen and listen.

'Will you never let me go?' she cries plaintively. 'Oh, will you never let me go?'

Then she sighs deeply, and again is still.

The house is very silent. More silent even than usual, for this morning old Clitheroe breathed his last.

A strange feeling of nervousness is upon me, making me keenly alive to all around, affecting me with thrills and shivers of horror at every sound, even of falling ash, or far-off footsteps, or rustling wind without. The very sound of my pen on the paper seems painfully audible.

I think I will give up writing, especially as I seem to have nothing to write, and try to soothe my excited nerves by reading.

2 *a.m.*.—As much for my own satisfaction as because of the extraordinary nature of the occurrence, do I sit down now to describe the events of that night.

Call it dream, fancy, vision, what I please—yet still I cannot get over the consciousness that I have actually witnessed the scene.

I had taken a book and seated myself by the fire in the large easy-chair. I commanded a full view of the bed from there. It lay in the shadow, as I had placed the lamp on the mantelpiece with a shade over it which merely threw the light down on myself and my book. I was intensely, almost painfully wide awake; my nerves, in fact, in a strained, tense state, the result of my long-borne and painful excitement and anxiety.

I had been reading for an hour or more when something—I cannot tell what—impelled me to look up. My eyes turned instantly to the bed.

Then I seemed to grow suddenly cold, and still and immovable. To save my life I could neither have spoken nor stirred a finger. I seemed frozen into a numbed and horrified stillness. For there, in the shadows of the curtains, and half bending over the recumbent figure on the bed, stood a woman in dark, flowing draperies. She was surrounded by what seemed a curious lambent vapour. This vapour seemed to hover about her, and to my surprise I could see through it, and clearly discern Nancette lying back on the pillows, apparently wrapped in the same deep slumber.

I struggled to speak, cry, move, but in vain. Chained and paralysed, I sat there gazing like one spellbound at the strange figure which I seemed to recognise at once by

means of Basil's description. The back was towards me; the face seemed bent over Nancette.

It seemed to me that if I could only throw off this weight of horror, and speak or move, I might dispel that baneful presence. But to do either was impossible.

Sometimes the figure looked dark and obscure—sometimes light and transparent, and still it never seemed to move, and still the silence of the room was unbroken.

Gradually the strained, intense feeling seemed to leave my brain. A strange drowsiness crept over it. I seemed to be falling asleep. The mysterious light enveloped all the room. The forces within me that had warred against this mystical presence subsided into dreamy languor. I felt my eyes closing.

What awoke me? A cry—Nancette's cry. I started to my feet. She was sitting up in the bed—her arms outstretched. I was at

her side, her arms were round me—clinging, terrified arms, like those of a child wakened out of a sleep by some fearful dream.

‘She has been here,’ she cried. ‘She says she will save me—give me back to life, love, fortune, happiness—all, on one condition! Myra, I am not asleep nor mad any longer. Oh, I feel so happy—so happy! It seems as if life had only now begun for me.

I held her close to my beating heart. I looked in amazement at her face. There was no care, or pain, or suffering in it now. Her lips had resumed their tender curves, her lovely eyes swam in delicious languor; a delicate flush was on the rounded cheeks, and a sort of radiance seemed around about her, that I had never seen before.

‘And what was the condition?’ I asked, trembling, half with fear, half with joy, as she rested there in my arms, the lovely, living, tender Nancette of old.

'That I give her back her husband and her child,' she whispered very low.

'*You !*' I cried. 'How can you do that ? Do you know them ?'

'No ; but she is coming again to tell me their names.'

I shuddered involuntarily.

'My dear,' I said, 'this passes belief. You cannot mean it.'

'Yes,' she said solemnly ; 'I do mean it. It is not a hard thing to do, when by it I may find happiness and peace once more.'

Then she sank gently back on the pillows.

'I am going to sleep now,' she said. 'To-morrow I shall be quite well.'

Even to myself this reads something like the delirium of fever, but I am perfectly convinced of its truth. I am absolutely certain I was awake, and I am as absolutely certain of the actual presence of that singular being, as

I am of the fact of Nancette's extraordinary return to reason and calmness.

Strange to say, all fear and horror have left me. My nerves have subsided into quietude. The shadows and solitude affect me no longer.

March 3rd.—Nancette slept on till noon to-day. Then she awoke and asked for food. I gave her some strong soup I had ready for her. After she had taken it she wished to rise and dress, but I insisted on her remaining in bed.

‘I assure you,’ she said, smiling, ‘I am quite well. But if you won't let me get up, will you send Basil here to see me?’

To this I readily agreed, though I wondered she had not asked for Errol.

I arranged the pillows, and wrapped a thick white shawl round her shoulders; then I summoned Basil.

He started as he came into the room.

'Why, you look quite well!' he cried gladly.

'And so I am,' she answered. 'Only Mrs. Freere won't believe it. I am tired of being ill; I want to get up and be out. How are the pets, Basil; and where is Stewart? You were always inseparable.'

Tears rushed to the boy's eyes. He tried manfully to conceal his emotion.

'He is at school,' he said. 'I did not go this term. I—I was not well.'

'Ah,' she cried suddenly, while a look of horror flashed into her eyes, 'I remember now! That day—that horrible dog—and how brave you were. Tell me, are you safe—well?'

'Yes,' he said eagerly; 'I was quite cured. Do not distress yourself on that score.'

'And are we still at Guernsey?' she asked, turning to me.

'No,' I said; 'you are at home—at Owl's Roost.'

Then for the first time a troubled look crept into her eyes. She put her hand to her brow.

'Oh,' she cried, 'I should not be here! I have no right to be here. I must go back to Guernsey.'

'But, dear,' I said gently, 'this is your home—your own home. I am sure you will stop here now you are well and strong once more.'

But the flush of excitement deepened in her cheek, and her eyes grew full of pain and restlessness.

'No,' she repeated; 'I have no right here. I must not stay here; I must go back to Guernsey. And you,' she added, turning to Basil, 'you must come with me. You must not leave me now.'

'I will certainly come if you wish it,' he said earnestly. 'You remember how often I vowed myself to your service, Lady Nancye.'

She smiled.

'The old name,' she said. 'How long it is since I have heard it! Have I been very ill?'

'Yes,' the boy answered gravely; 'very—very ill.'

'I suppose so,' she said dreamily; 'for it was summer-time; and now—— What month is this?'

'March,' I said; 'the 3rd of March.'

'March!' Her eyes took a strange, dreamy look, the colour wavered in her cheeks. 'I have not much time left,' she said; 'for it must be all done before my birthday.'

Basil looked puzzled.

'What has to be done?' he asked.

'My task,' she said gravely. 'The service I must render, and for which health and strength have been given back to me.'

Basil and I looked at each other perplexed. She pressed her hands against her brow with the old troubled gesture.

‘There was a letter,’ she said presently. ‘I must read it; then I shall be able to act. You have it,’ she added, turning to Basil. ‘Bring it to me here. It is a letter from Léonie. The last.’

Basil grew pale.

‘Don’t ask for it,’ he said distressfully. ‘You always get ill when you hear or see those letters.’

‘But I shall not get ill now,’ she said gravely. ‘Everything is clear before me. A weight has been lifted off my brain. Bring me that letter.’

Basil left the room. Then she turned hurriedly to me and seized my arm.

‘Myra,’ she said, ‘is *he* here?’

‘Who do you mean?’ I asked.

‘Errol—my husband. I dreamt he was here—no longer cold and stern, but kind, and loving, and gentle, as you have so often described him. Was it he?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘He is here.’

She covered her face with her hands. I could see the warm colour deepening in her cheek and neck.

'I dare not see him,' she said. 'Oh, I am sorry he is here! I need all my strength.'

'He would be glad to see you,' I said soothingly. 'He has forgiven the past. He knows how you have suffered and struggled; he is ready to——'

She held up her hand.

'No,' she said; 'he is not. I deceived him. He can never forget that. He was told a lie—a cruel lie. Only the person who told it can unsay it—can prove I was innocent, as I said. I will make her do so—I will force her to speak truth. Then he will see I did not deceive him willingly—he will believe at last.'

I looked at her in absolute bewilderment. It seemed to me her brain still wandered.

'Then it was a—woman,' I faltered slowly. 'I thought you were speaking of Pierre de Volens.'

She looked full at me.

'Of that coward!' she said, with the bitterest contempt in her voice and face. 'No. He did harm enough, but it was his accomplice who told Errol Glendenning the horrible lie which turned his heart against me.'

Then again she put her hand to her brow.

'As I lay here,' she said, 'my whole past life seemed to be mapped out before me. I saw everything I had done, as clearly as if I were reading the pages of a book. All my folly—all my weakness—all my sin—all my suffering. I saw, too, that I could not bear it much longer—that it would kill me unless relief came. Suddenly relief did come. A cool hand touched my brow and quenched the burning flames that filled my brain; it touched my heart, and its pain and agony

died slowly away into peace and restfulness. The fever ceased to throb like liquid fire in my veins. I grew calm and at rest. I listened to the voice of my healer, and heard it declare my task, and I woke up calm and remembering, to see your face again, and feel that the long spell of darkness, and dreariness, and suffering, was over.'

I shuddered as I listened. I remembered what I had seen—the strange figure, the lambent flames hovering over the motionless form upon the bed, the sense of horror and immovability that had held me chained and still, there in my seat by the dying fire. Was it a vision, or reality? If I had dreamt it, how could it be known to Nancette? Had not her recovery been almost supernatural? The previous day she had been raving in delirium. To-night she was sane, calm, restored to health, and life, and memory.

It was the nearest approach to a miracle

that I could conceive. I looked at her half in doubt, half in fear. My wandering thoughts found echo in speech.

‘It is marvellous,’ I said ; ‘I cannot understand it.’

‘I don’t want to understand,’ she said simply. ‘I am content to know *it is*.’

And I thought of the faith that is simple, and childlike, and unquestioning, yet can remove mountains of doubt.

We looked at each other, silently, thoughtfully, absorbed in mutual theories and speculations. Then Basil entered, pale and awestruck, with Léonie’s letter in his hand. He gave it to Nancette as she stretched out her eager fingers. Then we both withdrew to the fireplace and watched her as she read.

CHAPTER VII.

SHE put the letter down at last, and seemed lost in thought. Then she turned to Basil.

‘How soon,’ she asked abruptly, ‘can we leave for Guernsey?’

He made a rapid calculation.

‘The boats run twice a week,’ he said. ‘This is Tuesday. We could go on Friday, if—if you were strong enough.’

‘I am quite strong,’ she said gravely, ‘and quite well. I must go on Friday.’

‘Won’t you consult Errol first?’ I asked her anxiously.

‘Errol——’ she faltered, and grew very pale. ‘No,’ she went on rapidly; ‘I cannot see him until my task is over. I will not

look in his face again until I can do so fearlessly and without shame. I have been in a false position ever since I came here. I would not have remained an hour under his roof had I known what I know now. I would have first verified my right to his respect, and then awaited his judgment.'

I looked at her aghast. I could not recognise the simple, patient, martyred Nancette, in this quiet, assertive, and calmly-judging woman. I felt quite helpless, but I wondered what Errol would say when he heard of her whim, and how he would like this complete ignoring of his own presence or wishes.

She folded the letter together slowly and thoughtfully.

'May I keep it?' she asked Basil; and he, puzzled, and wondering as I myself at her strange looks and words, immediately consented. 'It is the first light to guide me on my way,' she went on presently, 'What is to follow I do not know myself; but I shall

learn. Ah, yes; I shall learn. And now,' she added, after a short pause, 'leave me with Myra; I have a great deal to say to her. And I must sleep and rest, or I shall not be strong for to-morrow.'

He went up and took her outstretched hand, and kissed it gently and reverently. Then he left the room.

'Come and sit here,' she said to me.

So I drew the chair to the side of the bed and sat down by her.

'I am going to try and—remember,' she said slowly. 'Tell me if I am wrong. . . It is hot, bright weather. There is no cloud in the sky—no wave on the water. I leave you and drive down a steep, stony road to the sea. I idle about for a long, long time. There is a boat moored under the shadow of the cliffs. I get in; the owner is only a fisher-lad. He is asleep. I wake him and persuade him to take me out on the water. We go. Then I see another boat put off. I

know who is in it. I urge him to greater speed. I promise him gold—any sum he likes—only to take me on and away out of reach. They are pursuing me. I know it. I see the woman's malicious face, the man's triumphant one. Their mocking voices reach me over the water. "Faster!" I cry. "Faster—faster!" . . . The sky is growing darker now; the wind roughens the water all around. The boat flies over the waves; my hand guides it. I feel mad—exhilarated by the sense of danger and defiance. The elements are my friends; they serve me well. The rower speaks at last. "No boat can fight against such a storm," he says. "We must put in to land." I see a line of towering rock, a fury of wild, dashing water; then all grows dark and silent. . . . Again I am on the sea. It is clear, bright day. The boat flies on. I see only a dark figure in the stern, silent as the dead. Her white face, her strange eyes startle me. I look, and

look ; then my own close ; I seem lulled to sleep by a will stronger than my own. . . . It is night again—darker, deeper night. Strange fires burn amidst the inky darkness ; a towering shape is before me ; I hear a voice that questions from afar. I answer without will or purpose of my own. I lose all count of time—of night or day. Then one day I seem to seek the outer air and feel the breath of heaven. Yet not I, but something of me and within me, that leaves my body in its trance of sleep, and sees and hears as one who dreams, with perfect consciousness of vision. It is always night, and life seems vague and far away. Invisible bonds fetter me ; I learn strange secrets ; I see things horrible and full of dread. . . .'

She bent her head on her clasped hands ; a convulsive shudder shook her frame.

'I do not wish to learn those secrets, but I am forced to do so. When I wake I have but dim and shapeless memories. I am con-

scious of horrible pain. My brain seems on fire at one moment, or dazed and cold at another. Then a voice calls me. I hear it; I struggle; I see light; I feel the breath of heaven. Then again all grows dark for a long, long time. . . . Now, what is this? I must watch for someone—I feel he is coming. His thoughts are here long before his actual presence. He has come. He does not know me; there is a barrier between us. Again all is dark and turbulent, and full of weird dreams and feverish fancies. Give me your hand, Myra. Ah, how your touch comforts me! I must be calm now; I need all my strength. . . . It is night, and all is dark and still. I wake from long sleep, and see you there by the fire. There is a book in your hand; the light falls upon your face. How pale and wan it looks! I long to speak, but my voice is only a whisper. You cannot hear it. Suddenly a dark cloud floats across the room; I see you no longer; but

someone else is here beside me—a strange form, shadowy, yet full of light. I seem to know it, and a great fear rests stonily upon my heart as I listen. You are asleep; your book rests idly on your lap; you do not hear the compelling accents of that voice.'

Here she broke off abruptly and looked up at my face.

'Are you frightened, Myra?' she asked. 'You need not be. I am well and safe. The horrible spell is broken. But a little while, and my task is over; and then——'

She lifted up her radiant face; her warm, clinging hands were linked with mine.

'You have been my friend so long,' she said; 'tell me you will be so still. Help me back to love, and happiness, and peace, as once you vowed to do.'

I seemed to grow cold, and still, and calm. I could not realize this change that had come upon her. Yet she was herself once more. She had regained mind, health,

beauty, and I seemed but the victim of some strange and long-cherished delusion. Her friend? Of course I was her friend! Nothing had changed that, or could change it. Her friend and—his.

The thought of Errol was sharp and sudden as pain. Perhaps my face changed. I cannot tell.

I only know something leapt into her eyes. A fear—a challenge.

‘Myra!’ she cried. ‘What is it? You have borne so much—you have overtaxed your strength. I—oh, how thoughtless I have been! There, rest your dear head on my pillow, and close those feverish eyes. They need not look so sorrowful now. How hopeful and brave they always were! Do not fancy I forget that.’

‘Oh, hush!’ I cried passionately. ‘I—I cannot bear it. My strength seems all gone, and I must not give way now.’

‘No,’ she said gravely, ‘nor will you.’

You shall rest your poor, tired head here, and I will watch you. There is nothing more to fear.'

'*Nothing more to fear!*' With the echo of those words in my heart, I seemed to sink into a sudden, deep slumber.

When I awoke the sun was streaming in through the curtained window. She sat beside me dressed—radiant, bright with health and beauty. No longer the pale, distraught shadow whose wandering steps had echoed through those cheerless rooms and filled our hearts with pity and with dread.

'I am so glad you are awake,' she said. 'They have just brought some coffee. Basil has been here. We have arranged to leave by the mid-day train.'

I sprang hastily up.

'There is not much time to pack,' I said; 'and all the maids have left. I must set to work at once.'

'You!' she said. 'Are you coming too?'

‘Most certainly,’ I answered. ‘Did you suppose for a single moment I should allow you to go alone?’

‘Oh,’ she said softly, ‘how good you are! How can I ever repay you?’

‘By making Errol Glendenning happy,’ I said.

She raised her calm and lovely eyes to mine.

‘May Heaven help me to do it,’ she said solemnly, ‘*in that day whose dawn I await!*’

Errol was sitting alone in his study when I sought him. I saw by the first glance at his face that Basil had brought him the news. He turned quickly to me as I entered.

‘Is this true, Myra?’ he asked coldly. ‘She has recovered sense and reason only to leave here on some foolish errand? I cannot believe it.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘it is true; but you cannot

judge her actions or fancies as you would those of another person. She is under the guidance of some mysterious influence. You know how sceptical I was. Well, I am so no longer. I am convinced Nancette must do what she has been directed to do, if ever you wish her to regain full health and reason.'

"*Et tu, Brute,*"' he quoted with a melancholy smile. 'What has changed you, Myra?'

I told him of that strange vision.

'I could have believed I was asleep,' I said; 'but when she told me of it, too, describing what I alone thought I had seen—describing also my own helplessness and stupor under an influence altogether unaccountable—then I could doubt no longer.'

'And you are going with her on this wild-goose chase?' he asked. 'Is not that testing your friendship too much, Myra?'

'No,' I said simply; 'you know I always like to carry through what I have undertaken.'

I could not let her go alone, or only with Basil, and *you* are out of the question.'

'As I have always been,' he said bitterly, 'as I always shall be.'

'No,' I said eagerly; 'I am sure you are wrong. Something will clear up your error; you will find you have misjudged her. Wait, Errol, only a little longer. Already I see hope. The dark shadow is lifting slowly from your life. It is not too late for happiness, believe me.'

'You are a true friend,' he said, looking at me with those grave, sad eyes, unchanged since boyhood in their expression of sorrowful endurance. 'But you know enough to know that for me happiness is no longer possible.'

For a moment I was silent. Then I asked him a question.

'How long is it,' I said, 'till the date fixed for delivery to Nancette of her father's letter?'

He thought for a few moments. Then he said :

‘The 20th of September next.’

‘On that day,’ I said, ‘Nancette will be here—free, safe, justified. On that day let us meet again. These years of penance may surely plead pardon for a youthful folly. I am sure it was no more. I am sure that woman Lamontaine deceived you for a purpose of her own. The tangled web of this poor child’s life needs careful unravelling. She has been a tool in unscrupulous hands; they have wrung money, peace, and apparently honour from her grasp. Let her vindicate herself in her own way—let her accomplish her own destiny unfettered and unhindered. Then, whatever Fate has in store for you, at least you need not blame yourself.’

I spoke eagerly, vehemently; I seemed urged by some unseen power to do so. I could not help myself, and I felt that truth

and purpose were in my words. Errol looked at me for a moment in silence.

Then he drew his breath sharply.

'I hate mystery and darkness,' he said. 'But they seem around my every action now. What can I say—what ought I to say? If I could see her——'

'She will not see you,' I said; 'and it would not be wise to force her. Let things take their course. She is safe with me—surely you know that. And, whatever happens, rest assured that on the 20th day of September we shall be here once more.'

'Do you know,' he asked abruptly, 'what she purposes or intends?'

I shook my head.

'No,' I answered; 'only that she insists on going to Guernsey.'

'You have been very good to her,' he said, 'and to me. But we have no right to tax your life in this fashion. Why should you be whisked off to Guernsey at a moment's

whim, and for a purpose altogether irrational and unexplained ?

‘Why—because I wish it,’ I said, smiling ; ‘and I am a somewhat obstinate person, as you know.’

His face changed as he looked at me. The tenderness, the kindliness, the pity of it seemed to overwhelm me and make me weak. For a few seconds the room seemed painfully still—so still, I could hear the quick, loud beats of my heart. I grew afraid then.

‘I cannot stay,’ I said timidly. ‘She is waiting. May I tell her it is all arranged—that you have agreed ?’

‘Tell her,’ he said, ‘whatever you wish. My trust in you has never wavered, Myra.’

He lifted my hands to his lips with the grave reverence of a courtier to a queen.

I trembled and grew faint now that success was mine. So much had depended on his consent—so much, and it was won !

'Good-bye,' I said, in a stifled, far-off voice that almost frightened myself.

'But I shall see you again?' he urged.
'You don't leave to-day?'

'In an hour,' I said faintly.

* * * * *

This last page of my journal is disfigured by stains of tears. I have written it long after that farewell.

Our deepest tragedies are told in fewest words. I alone knew what 'Good-bye' meant for me as the warm hand-clasp relaxed, as those kindly eyes were blotted out from sight by the mist that filled my own. I do not know how I reached my room. There seemed an endless road between it and the one where he still stood. But Heaven gives women strange strength sometimes!

I found myself sitting quite still, gazing out of window.

The room was full of the litter of packing, but no one was there.

A voice roused me at last, calling my name clearly, sweetly, through the deep, hushed silence. It seemed to brace my nerves, to give back courage, patience, strength. There was the rustle of a dress, the light sound of footsteps.

'Ah, you are here! Have you seen him?'

'Yes,' I said quietly.

'And he is quite satisfied?'

'He is quite—satisfied,' I answered like a dull, senseless echo.

BOOK VI.

DESTINY.

CHAPTER I.

THE sun was boldly dispelling the mists that lay over the straggling frontage of St. Peter Port. A few figures were idly sauntering about the White Rock Pier, watching the boat as it steamed into the harbour.

Among them was the slight form of a young girl. Her attitude was listless ; her dark, melancholy eyes had a far-away look. She had come there with no settled purpose, and was mechanically watching the steamer's approach, with no interest in its possible passengers of to-day more than those of any other day.

Only a few disembarked. Among them two ladies and a young man. The usual

stream of porters surrounded them, and for a moment shut them from sight. Then they came towards that listless figure in the glow of the warm March sun. The ladies were thickly veiled, but the form of their young escort seemed to flash in sudden and familiar recognition upon the startled girl.

She sprang towards him, her hand outstretched in eager welcome.

'Basil!'

'Léonie!'

The ladies started and turned towards her. There came a whirl of questions and replies. They all walked on together full of wonder and delight at the chance meeting.

'Why did you not tell me you were coming?' asked the girl reproachfully. 'I could have got rooms for you.'

'It was a sudden decision,' explained Basil, 'and we are going to our old hotel, so there will be no trouble.' He lingered for a moment behind the two veiled figures. 'Don't

ask any question—yet,’ he said hurriedly. ‘I will explain all when we are alone. Can you meet me at sunset at the little bay?’

‘Yes,’ she answered quietly.

Then they joined the others, and walked up to the hotel.

‘You must lie down and rest,’ said Mrs. Freere to Nancette. ‘You look tired to death.’

The girl threw back her veil. Her face was deathly white. She submitted passively to her friend’s kindly services; her heavy travelling-cloak was removed; her dress followed. Then Myra Freere wrapped a soft cashmere dressing-gown round the slender figure, unloosed the long, thick plaits of hair, and made her lie down on the bed while she herself prepared to follow her example.

Weary and spent with the long, rough passage, they both fell asleep, and slept on till late in the afternoon.

A knock at the door awoke them. It was the chambermaid come to say dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour. Myra rose with a start; there was a confused sense of unreality about her surroundings, the result of any sudden change. Nancette was sitting up in the adjoining bed. She looked less weary now.

'I have had a lovely sleep,' she said, and rose, and went over to the window, and looked out at the wide stretch of sea, all gold and amber in the setting sun.

A puzzled, troubled look came into her eyes.

'It seems such a long time since I was here,' she said wistfully. 'Such a long—long time.'

'Only last summer,' said Myra Freere, coming over to her.

'And you all gave me up for dead,' she went on wistfully. 'The people here will think I am a ghost!'

‘Have you any plans?’ asked Myra, a little anxiously. ‘What are we to do now we are here?’

The girl was silent. Her eyes still rested on the dancing waters, where the sunbeams sparkled and shone. To westward the clouds lay piled in rich masses of colour; a scarlet glow, intense and soft as the hue of the pomegranate flowers, bathed them in splendour, and spread, rosy and mystical as a blush, over the sky.

The girl looked, and a sigh trembled on her lips.

‘The world is very beautiful,’ she said. ‘One would not think it was so hard to be happy in it.’ Then she roused herself with an effort, and turned to her friend. ‘Plans?’ she said vaguely. ‘No; I have none. I must only wait. I shall know what to do when the time comes.’

Meanwhile, pacing slowly to and fro over

the sand and shingle of the little bay, were Basil Glendenning and Léonie St. Jean. Rapidly and concisely the boy was relating the events of the last month.

'It is hard to believe,' the girl said at last; 'but I suppose it must be true. I wonder what will be the end?'

'I suppose,' said Basil, involuntarily dropping his voice, 'I suppose you have seen nothing more of—her?'

'No,' said the girl, her eyes turning seaward and resting on a far-off pile of rocks that lay like a dark blot against the ruby and gold of the bright horizon line. 'Sometimes I wonder——'

Her voice broke. She started, and the colour left her face.

'Look!' she said, and clasped Basil's arm with cold and trembling fingers.

The boy followed her glance. A little to the right of them the ground sloped gradually upwards, and standing there, outlined

against the reddened glory of the dying light, was a dark figure.

To both it was too well known for terror or surprise to greet its sudden appearance. They stood and watched it in fascinated silence.

It moved at last, yet rather seemed to float than walk down the sloping incline. As it faced them the glow and fervour of colour died out from the sky, the last ray of light that linked the sun to earth was severed. In the chill, gray twilight, the figure looked spectral and weird, and Basil Glendenning felt again that strange remembered thrill of fear and horror.

Then the voice of the Woman broke the silence. It sounded strangely gentle now.

‘You need not fear,’ she said to Basil. ‘I shall not harm her. Service for service, task for task. She alone can do what I will and wish. She has come, and waits my

bidding. Yet your love guards her like a shield. For your sake I come to you now, instead of bringing her to myself. Are you content ?

'I am content,' said Basil gravely, 'if you promise never again to throw her into that strange delusion that held her brain in thrall so long. Why should you tell her she is dead ?'

'I told her that to serve my own ends ; but now the living woman can serve them better, and she shall live.'

Basil grew pale.

'What your strange power is,' he said, 'I do not know. It is as cruel as it is strong.'

'It is destiny,' said the cold, sad voice. 'She was sent to me without wish of mine. Her life, succoured and nourished by my power, grew submissive to my will. The temperament I had debased and sinned against in my own person, was here in all

its pure, and ethereal, and sensitive powers in the person of another. She opened to me a new world ; through her I gained clearer knowledge, a deeper insight, and soared to unknown and undreamt-of heights. Together we should have perfected the science to which I had devoted life, reason, soul. You forced her from me by a power at once pure, unselfish, strong. Had it held the alloy of passion, the selfishness of base hopes, the purely material force of a human will, I could have triumphed. But the innocent have a strange power. Your prayers, your tears, have consecrated her and hold her safe. Yet let her serve me once—but once—and I give her back the happiness she has never tasted, and for which her tortured heart so wildly craves.'

'What is it you wish her to do?' asked the boy boldly.

'That I cannot tell you.'

Her voice trembled, her mournful eyes

rested yearningly on the cold, averted face of the young girl.

'Will it do her harm?' Basil asked again.
'You know how she has suffered.'

'Have I not cured her?' asked the strange being gently. 'Did I not bring her relief, health, strength? No, I will not harm her; that I promise. But she must be free to do my bidding till such time as I release her.'

'And if she refuse?' asked the boy hurriedly.

'She will not refuse, for she *cannot*.'

'But I——'

'You have the power to place a spirit of resistance, of antagonism, between us; but she will be the sufferer. The warring powers at work within her spirit will again destroy reason, and sap the vital energies of the body.'

'And the result?'

'Will be physical death. But spiritual disease will come first.'

The boy stood silent. Was this a rhodomontade of folly, or the revelation of a new and incomprehensible truth? The sound of the wind, the gray haze of sky and sea, the beat of the waves upon the shingle, all seemed far off and strange. A curious, dreamy sensation crept over his brain. Remembering what it had foretold once before, he roused himself with an effort.

‘I cannot understand you,’ he said. ‘But it would be folly to deny that you have some strange power over Nancette—that she, on her side, is unable to resist or combat you. Therefore, if you say she must perform this service, I suppose she must; only, of this I am determined, she shall do nothing out of my presence, neither shall she visit your strange abode.’

‘Let it be so,’ came the answer, sounding faint and far away.

A pale gray mist was creeping up from the sea. The dusky outlines of that strange

figure seemed to melt away amidst its hazy vapour.

'She is gone !' cried Léonie, and the two young creatures, attracted by the mutual sympathy of fear and mystery, involuntarily drew nearer.

Then, hand-in-hand, and talking in low, hushed tones, they too disappeared in the gathering mist, while the tide crept higher up the shingly beach, left now to the darkness and loneliness of night.

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CHAPTER II.

WHEN Basil reached the hotel, he found Nancette and Myra Freere impatient at his long absence.

He began some hurried excuse, but Nancette looked steadily at him, and a strange smile swept over her face.

‘You have seen—her?’ she said.

The boy coloured.

‘Yes,’ he answered; ‘you are right. She is more mysterious than ever. I cannot understand what she wants of you. Some service, she says.’

Again that strange smile hung over the girl’s lips.

‘I know,’ she said, ‘what she requires. The task is hard no longer.’

'Please, my dear children,' said Myra hastily, 'let us have done with mystery for a little while. I want some substantial food. Whatever you do, don't spoil my appetite with the weird prophecies and mandates of this sybil.'

They drew round the table then, and for a few moments the meal proceeded in silence.

'I begin to feel material again,' said Myra presently. 'I have a consciousness that Bogey is hiding somewhere in the dark corners, or behind the window-curtains, but meat and wine, and fruit and flowers, are elements that serve to banish his actual presence. I know,' she went on, laughing, 'that I must adapt myself to rapid changes of mental attitude. But I am thankful for a spell of material comfort. When do you next purpose to upset it?'

Nancette looked at her gravely.

'I know,' she said, 'that you don't believe.

I might be happier if I could say the same ; but it is not in my power.'

'Nor in mine !' echoed Basil.

'The truth is,' said Myra, 'that this woman is a crazy mystic of strong mesmeric powers. Accident threw Nancette in her way, and proved her to be a marvellous subject. She has played upon her weakness—the failure of mental powers, the excited state of her nerves, the affinity of two similar natures. She cannot proceed further in her researches without the aid of a subject, and she has chosen Nancette for that subject by force of a stronger will. I am sorry,' she added, with a laugh that was more scornful than amused, 'that she did not choose me.'

'So am I,' said Basil, looking sadly at Nancette's white face. 'Or me ; I should like to be mesmerised. What is it like, my Ladye Nancye ?'

She gave a little sigh.

'You will see for yourself,' she said dreamily.

'When?' asked the boy.

'To-night.'

'To-night!' they both echoed, and looked hastily round.

The room was brightly lighted—no sign of mystery or darkness was apparent.

The waiter entered and removed the plates and dishes, and set the dessert before them. Then he withdrew, and the three were once more alone.

'Do you really mean it?' asked Basil, startled and awestruck.

Nancette glanced at the clock.

'In ten minutes' time,' she said, 'she will be here.'

'Nonsense!' said Myra Freere sharply. 'Do you mean in her actual bodily presence?'

'Yes,' said the girl quietly; 'she is on her way now.'

An uncomfortable silence fell over them. Myra Freere's calm mind and sense resented

this intrusion of mystery and darkness. She did not speak again, but covertly watched the hands of the clock, while Nancette sipped her claret and ate the fruit which Basil had peeled for her. Five, eight, nine, ten minutes.

Then the door was thrown open, a voice simply announced, 'A lady for Madame,' and a tall figure, veiled and cloaked in sombre garments, stood in the entrance-way.

The door closed. Basil and Myra Freere sprang to their feet. Nancette neither moved nor turned. The visitor threw back her long veil, and disclosed to Myra the strange face whose description she knew so well. The white hair, the wax-like skin, the strangely-glowing eyes—there they were, animate and exact, as Léonie had written of them in her letter.

She took no notice of Basil or his companion, but walked straight up to Nancette and laid her hand on her shoulder.

'You have come,' she said, 'and I thank you !'

Nancette still remained silent, but a dreamy languor seemed to steal into her eyes. She put her hand to her brow, as if to push aside the soft weight of hair that oppressed it.

'I have come to you,' she said at last, 'because I could not help it. But promise you will not drag me to that dreadful place again.'

'You will visit it,' said the strange woman, 'but once more, and that will be of your own will and desire, not of mine.'

'May I ask,' said Myra Freere abruptly, 'what you purpose doing with my friend ?'

The strange eyes turned to her, scintillating with wrath and defiance.

'Sceptic and doubter !' she cried, 'what have I to do with you ?'

Then again she turned to Nancette. 'I do not need you yet,' she said. 'Rest, and gain health and strength until the hour comes.'

'To-morrow seek this place.' She handed her a paper. 'It is quieter than the hotel, and it is at your service as long as you need. I will come to you there,' she added mournfully, 'when the way is made clear. As yet it is dark and obscure. A great sorrow threatens me—it lies like a shadow upon your life too. From one it will pass, on the other it must fall. It is fate—the fate that rules the universe—that links your life with the ruin and despair of mine. And now—farewell!'

Like a cloud she seemed to drift away, and was gone without sound or motion.

Myra gave a shiver.

'This is very uncomfortable,' she said, approaching Nancette. 'And after all,' she added, 'she has not mesmerised you.'

She looked at the girl; her head was bent down, her eyes were closed. Then she drew sharply away, and turned to Basil.

'She is asleep!' she cried wonderingly.

'She is mesmerised,' said the boy. 'And I——'

He staggered a few steps, then sank down on the couch. He too was asleep.

'Powers of Heaven!' cried Myra; 'what will happen next? I shall believe I can be mesmerised, too.'

As she spoke the room seemed suddenly to grow dark. She felt giddy, stupefied; then she sank down in the chair by which she had been standing. Her eyes closed. A voice sounding far away and muffled seemed moaning through the air:

'For an hour—for an hour—for an hour!'

Amidst the drowsy reiteration of those words she heard a clock striking eight.

'One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine!'

With the last stroke the three sleepers opened their eyes simultaneously

‘It is very odd,’ said Basil, starting up.
‘We seem to have all been asleep.’

‘Not odd at all!’ exclaimed Myra Freere angrily. ‘That dreadful woman mesmerised us. I saw Nancette go off, then you, then I followed your example.’

‘Now perhaps you will believe,’ said the boy triumphantly. ‘There *is* something in it, you see. Have I not told you again and again that a powerful magnetiser can overcome any resistance, and convey any impression he or she desires? Did you feel you must wake as the clock struck nine?’

‘Yes,’ said Myra rather crossly. ‘I suppose the creature made a fool of me on purpose.’

‘We all shared the same fate for once,’ said Nancette. ‘But those sleeps do me so much good. I feel as if I gained new vital energy every time.’

She rose to her feet. A lovely flush was on her cheeks; her eyes had that exquisite

humid languor which Myra had already noticed as the result of these magnetic trances.

She paced the room to and fro, her eyes resting on the paper in her hands—the paper given her by that strange visitor.

'I feel a delicious presentiment of happiness,' she said softly. 'Thoughts, feelings, altogether new and subtle, thrill me in some strange and inexplicable way. I feel as if life were just dawning. I am calm and at peace. Oh, the joy of that calm—the sweetness of that peace !'

Myra seated herself with a sigh of despair. It was no use to protest, or mock, or rail any longer. Against her calm common-sense, against the scepticism of reason, against all the array of materialism, this strangely-displayed power arrayed itself in triumph. She could not deny what she had seen and felt. She knew that submission was her only course. She had embarked on

an enterprise of mystery and darkness ; she must simply float on its tide unresistingly, and abide by its—as yet—unguessed results.

They all sat down by the window, and gazed out on the tranquil beauty of the spring night. The mist had lifted, and the moonlight poured itself lavishly over the glittering expanse of sea.

They talked in low, hushed voices. A sense of dreaminess and mystery was upon them that yet was not without a certain charm.

Both Myra Freere and Basil Glendenning felt assured that some strange mission had to be undertaken by Nancette — a mission of whose nature they were entirely ignorant.

They could not conceive how the threads of destiny could possibly have entangled the life of this young and ill-fated girl with that of the crazed and ascetic Mystic, who seemed to have been a pariah from all social or con-

ventional existence for long, long years. As little could they dream of the nature of the link that bound them — of the history of crime, and shame, and sorrow as yet to be unravelled.

By noon of the next day they found themselves at the spot indicated by their visitor of the previous night.

The house had apparently been a farmhouse, and lay down in the hollow of one of the smaller valleys intersecting the interior of the island. It was a long, one-storied building, framed in now by the bright green of ilex-oaks and beech-wood in their lovely spring verdure. Beyond it lay cornfields and grass-land and a few outbuildings and stables, apparently untenanted and in sad need of repair.

Basil walked up to the house-door and knocked. It was opened almost immediately by an old, wrinkled peasant-woman, who

seemed to expect them, and at once invited them in.

‘I have been informed by madame,’ she said, ‘that you desire the house for a few months on my own terms. Is it not so?’

‘What are your terms?’ asked Mrs. Freere quietly.

The sum named was so modest that she could raise no possible objection. The old woman then conducted them over the various rooms. All were daintily and spotlessly clean, and a neat-looking country girl, whom the old woman introduced as her daughter, was busy in the bright, sunny kitchen, and informed them that she was ready to do any work they should require.

‘It’s all very nice,’ said Nancette. ‘We cannot do better than settle here. It is much pleasanter than the hotel.’

So, after a little more consultation with the ostensible owner of the house, they agreed to enter upon their term of tenancy next day,

and then took leave of the old dame. As they reached the gates Basil turned and took a long, steady survey of the building. At last he turned to Myra Freere.

'Do you notice that window,' he said, 'there to the right, with the myrtle growing round it? Well, we were never in that room. I have a plan of the house in my head, and I know where we went all down the long, flagged passages, and the different outlooks of the windows. But we were never shown that room.'

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Freere, 'it is the old woman's own sanctum. For Heaven's sake, my dear boy, don't invent any more mysteries.'

'I will tell you exactly what is in that room,' said Nancette quietly. 'I saw it last night.'

They both turned and stared at her incredulously.

'Yes,' she went on; 'I was there in my sleep. There seems no visible entrance. You

go in by a sliding panel in the wall. It is a small, octagonal room. In the centre is a couch—an ordinary-looking couch, save that its feet are of glass. There are a few cane chairs that stand against the wall. The light is very dim, for the window is draped with black. There is a small cabinet in one corner, on which stands a lamp. There is no fireplace, but there is a carved shelf full of books, and a crystal globe on a small stand by the window. That is all.'

'Do you mean to tell me,' said Myra incredulously, 'that you saw all this?'

'Yes,' she answered tranquilly. 'It was shown to me for some purpose. I cannot tell what, but I shall know soon.'

'Oh,' said Myra helplessly, 'I acknowledge myself a convert to Bogey and the black art! Henceforward I shall be astonished at nothing. Do with me what you will, only don't have me mesmerised again. I draw the line there.'

CHAPTER III.

BUT though Myra Freere laughed and jested, she grew daily more uneasy and uncomfortable.

She remembered Basil a wild, merry schoolboy. Now he was utterly changed. She remembered Nancette pale, sad, heart-burdened ; but this mysterious creature, with her dreams, and trances of sleep, and mystical foresight, and calm, blind obedience to an inexplicable power, was something altogether different and terrifying.

‘What would be the end?’ she asked herself despairingly. ‘What would be the end?’

A veil of mystery was around her, and her

frank, direct, unwavering nature hated mystery. Again and again she reviewed Nancette's position, and the way in which she herself had drifted into sharing it. Again and again did she go back to those first days of self-sacrifice, when she had nerved herself to fulfil an unwelcome task for sake of the most loyal and disinterested friendship woman ever gave to man.

A series of facts at once stubborn and incontrovertible arrayed themselves before her. In no way that she could recall would alteration have been possible. She had vowed to serve Errol, to give him back happiness at any cost, and that happiness lay apparently in the power and keeping of this girl to whom love had been a foe, and for whose sake friendship was a long, weary sacrifice.

'I wonder why I ever began it?' sighed Myra involuntarily. But she knew well enough.

She was not one of those women whose

lines of life are cast in pleasant places. There had always been for her—even in youth—sacrifices, troubles, difficulties, thorn-pricks of ever-recurring disagreeables. Nothing had ever seemed to go quite smoothly, or quite easily.

'If things are ever cleared up,' she told herself, 'I shall not regret my own discomforts, nor allow that they are more than discomforts. But will they ever be cleared up? The story of Nancette's foolish romance, and its cloud of shame and sorrow, needs a strong light indeed to sweep away the shadows of mistrust. Then there is Pierre de Volens, and the mysterious French-woman, and this still more mysterious being who seems neither of earth nor air, and certainly is not of heaven. How is the tangled web to be unravelled? Oh, my poor Errol, it is weary work waiting and hoping in this fashion!'

The brave eyes filled as memory carried

her back to the gloomy house on that wild English coast, with its lonely master sole occupant of the desolate rooms.

‘He is worse off than I. I should not repine,’ she said.

She was wandering by herself near the old cromlech, known as L’Autel de Dehus (Devil’s Altar). The tide was far out. The little rocky pools were full of strange creatures of the sea; and green ribbon grasses and coloured seaweeds gleamed through the clear, bright water. Far as the eye could reach stretched the width of the glittering sea, broken only by the rocky shores of Herm and its surrounding reef; and all around was still, save for some bird’s note on the air, or the fluttering wings among the rocks.

She had come here in a sort of sullen rebellion at this network of dark and dreary mystery, which day by day seemed drawing her more closely within its meshes.

They had been a week in their new domicile, and during that week had received no further sign of their mysterious friend.

It was the time of the equinoxes, and strong winds and fierce gales had made the sea a thing of terror and of danger. Sometimes Myra found herself hoping that the woman had gone back to her own retreat, and would trouble them no further. But, even as she hoped it, a thrill of fear would chill her heart, and curdle her blood, and set itself in opposition to such futile wishes.

The sea was calmer to-day, the wind had died down, and with a sudden desire for her own uninterrupted companionship, she had walked to this place, and now sat there alone and melancholy—giving free rein to her brooding thoughts.

She remembered how she had first come to Owl's Roost, and with what tender interest she had regarded the lovely and

deserted girl whose fate had seemed so harsh and unjust. She remembered her bold plans on behalf of this girl—her resolute efforts, her determination to conquer the tide of public opinion, and to reinstate her in her rights as Errol Glendenning's wife, and mistress of his house. She remembered, and with added sadness, that other resolve to bring together those two disunited hearts—those misjudging and mistaken lives. And now all this had happened nearly three years ago, and she was no nearer victory than at first.

‘I must give it up,’ she said, half aloud. ‘But it has changed me as it has changed her. I am growing morbid, suspicious, nervous. Life is no longer a calm and equable thing; its balance is overthrown. I wonder what it all means—I wonder how it will all end! Perhaps,’ and she rose and half smiled as she smoothed back some of the soft chestnut locks that the

wind had ruffled—' perhaps it is the result of the equinox.'

She moved slowly on. The tide was rising rapidly, the banks of cloud in the west were dark and stormy. She had two miles to walk before she could reach their temporary home, but she cared too little for weather to let that fact trouble her.

Some half-mile or so from the cromlech she struck across a patch of common, thickly grown with furze and bramble, then turned into a narrow lane, mild and sheltered even in this cold spring evening. She was hurrying along rather quickly, when suddenly she saw, at a short distance in advance, two figures standing, and apparently in earnest conversation. They flashed upon her so suddenly that for a moment she stood quite still and watched them. As she did so a conviction dawned upon her that one was certainly Nancette. The other—the man—had his back turned to her. She could only

see that he wore a long, dark cloak, and was very tall. Walking on rather more quickly, she came to within a few yards of them, when the man turned abruptly aside, leaped the low hedge, and disappeared across the neighbouring field.

His companion stood quietly there. It was Nancette, and she awaited her friend's approach with perfect composure.

'You have been taking a walk,' she said. 'So have I.'

'Who was that with you?' asked Myra, sternly. 'It was not Basil?'

'Oh no,' said the girl, with a curious little smile; 'it was not—Basil.'

'But you don't know anyone else here,' said Myra, puzzled by the girl's manner, 'and you would not talk to a stranger.'

'It was—someone,' said Nancette slowly, and with a faint rush of colour to her face, 'who was asking the way to Braye du Val.'

'Oh,' said Myra coldly, and glancing in

the direction of the field-path, 'then he has certainly not taken it.'

Nancette laughed — an odd, mirthless laugh.

'Perhaps he has changed his mind,' she said. 'Come, do not trouble about him. Where have you been all the afternoon? Basil said you were evidently getting tired of us. Why, this morning you positively lost your temper.'

'I had sufficient reason,' was the answer.

'Dear Myra,' said the girl, linking her arm in that of her friend, 'I cannot explain. You must trust me, or leave me. I know,' she added sorrowfully, 'it is hard for one of your bold, straightforward nature to put up with all this mystery. But we have to fight with cruel and skilful foes, and I only realize now how much there is at stake.' Her face grew soft, a beautiful light glowed in her uplifted eyes. 'Oh,' she said softly, 'if I can only make Errol believe in me! If I can

only wring the truth from the cruel foe who holds it, then I would gladly die—indeed, indeed I would !’

And something in the purity and nobility of the young face set at rest the doubts in Myra Freere’s heart, and woke again its generous impulses of self-sacrifice and defence.

For some time they did not speak, only walked on through the narrow lane, while above the sky grew dark with the shadowy twilight, and the wind rustled the young spring leaves.

Then, quite suddenly, Nancette stopped and loosed her hold of Myra’s arm.

‘After all,’ she said, ‘why should I not tell you? What have I to fear? Dear friend—dear generous friend—I will hold nothing back from you again. You are right: I *did* know the man who spoke to me in the lane beyond. It was Pierre de Volens.’

Myra gave a little gasp.

'Ah,' she said, 'I thought so. And he is here again?'

'Yes,' said the girl; 'and I am glad of it. Glad——Ah no, Myra; do not look like that; surely you know me better now? Glad, because I can show him that his power has fled—because never again can word or prayer of his move or sway me. Glad, most of all, because his is the hand that can and shall right me in my husband's eyes, and give me back his lost faith. He has done me harm enough,' she went on bitterly; 'but his day is over. He holds my secret, but I hold his. It shall be war to the knife between us now.'

Her eyes flashed, she looked transformed, and Myra felt a thrill of fear as she looked at the passionate, exulting face.

'When I woke, after that long spell of darkness,' she went on presently, 'everything was changed. I seemed altogether

unlike myself, even to myself. I grew impatient at my own folly. I wondered how I could have borne for so long the cruel weight of an unjust suspicion, and something seemed always telling me that it must be put right—it *must*. And it does not only concern me now, but another. The way is dark, and I cannot see clearly as step by step I go on and on towards the end, but I know there will be light at last, and I await it.'

The colour faded out of her face. She took her friend's arm once more.

'Let us go home,' she said gently; 'and, Myra, don't think me mad—I must see Pierre de Volens again. Do not blame me, and do not fear for me. Believe me when I tell you that I know him now as the false and evil man he is—the worst and cruellest foe a woman ever had. I recognise the truth of my father's words at last. Better, indeed, to be dead than the wife of such a man!'

Myra was silent. The dusk had fallen rapidly ; a shower of rain came sweeping along, cold and chill. She hurried Nancette along, more anxious to reach shelter than to argue the ever-recurring question of the girl's purpose in coming here.

'You will be drenched through before you reach home,' she said, 'and only a week ago you were lying on a sick bed. How you trifle with your health !'

'My health,' said the girl, with that soft, mysterious smile, 'will last while I have need of it. Hope is the only medicine I need.'

They had a long way yet to go before they reached the old farmhouse, where Basil was anxiously awaiting them. On the threshold Nancette stayed her friend to whisper a caution in her ear.

'Do not tell him,' she said, 'of Pierre de Volens. He hates him so ; he would not understand.'

‘And I hate him, and I do not understand,’ said Myra. ‘But that counts for nothing.’

‘It will count,’ said Nancette, ‘for a great deal, when you know all.’

Then they entered the warm, bright parlour, leaving the gloom and wet of the deepening night behind, like an unpleasant memory.

CHAPTER IV.

AN hour later, they all sat, warm and dry, around the bright wood-fire, listening to the fierce gusts of wind and rain with a pleasant sense of security.

Basil was reading aloud a letter from Stewart; Myra was working, Nancette lying back in her chair, with idle fingers, and dreamy eyes, that watched the flickering flames. Suddenly she started and looked round. The others noticed her movement, and followed her glance. Standing in the recess of the wide, old-fashioned parlour was the well-known figure of the Woman in Black.

She did not speak, only moved aside,

revealing an aperture in the wall of the room which had evidently been concealed by a sliding panel. Another room was plainly visible, whose existence none of them had hitherto suspected. An uncomfortable feeling swept over Myra Freere. She remembered conversations, suppositions, remarks none too flattering, which might have, and in all probability had been overheard during this past week, when they had imagined themselves free from intrusion or eavesdropping.

At present, however, their visitor merely made a gesture of invitation, and the whole trio, as if by one spontaneous movement, rose and advanced in her direction.

Myra could not repress a murmur of astonishment as the panel slid back, and they found themselves in a small octagonal chamber, furnished exactly as Nancette had described to them on the first day of their visit to the house. There was the couch, the

chairs, the shelf of books, the solitary window draped in sombre black, a cabinet on which burned a lamp that dimly lit the room, and on a small stand a crystal globe of water.

Without speaking, the woman motioned them to their places — Nancette to the couch, Basil and Myra to the chairs by the window.

Basil shuddered. He thought of the scene in the cave, of the form that had been dead to memory, life, or will, and had answered his frenzied appeal with chill indifference.

Myra armed herself with angry scepticism, putting out all her forces of opposition, indignation, and obstinacy, as a hedgehog does its prickles. She might have saved herself the trouble. One wave of the hand, and she was in a deep sleep. Neither roar of cannon, nor shriek of murder, nor cry of suffering could waken her, till such time as that invincible will chose to release her from its spell.

Basil sat there calm, and grave, and watchful. Convinced that no harm was meant to Nancette, he was prepared to investigate and watch the forthcoming proceedings with the deepest interest.

The woman merely looked at the figure of the girl as it lay stretched on the couch. Then it seemed to relax, the breathing grew calm and even. The eyes closed. She lay asleep like a tired child, and looked indeed as young and fair.

The woman turned to Basil.

‘I will not touch you,’ she said. ‘You can remain and judge for yourself. But first let me explain something of all this to you. Marvellous as my power looks, it is no new and unheard-of development. It is the result of long years of isolation, and study, and asceticism.

‘To every human being who voluntarily withdraws from association with his fellow-men and gives himself up to study the

mysteries of his own being, its formation, its spiritual functions, essence, and destiny, there will come the repayment of great and marvelous discoveries.

'Magnetism is, of all phenomena, the most vital and serious, both as a medical and spiritual agent. The world is, as yet, too blind, or too heedless, or too sceptical to fully investigate this marvel. We are not mere creatures of clay, but temples of mystery, and yet temples without light, or sound, or beauty, because of the dead faculties and undeveloped powers that rest in abeyance within us. The material part is so far stronger than the immaterial, that it holds it in an iron bondage, from which it scarcely seeks escape. Some get faint glimpses of truth, yet dare not pursue it for fear of results; others ponder in secret over what they feel is revealed, yet which the first words of the scoffer and the sceptic rend into fragments of ridicule.

'Thus mankind hug their chains of dark-

ness and self-delusion, and so the bold exponents of a new truth gain but rude disbelief, or cruel indifference.'

Her voice grew mournful, like a chant; her eyes rested sadly on the pale, eager face of the listening boy.

'I,' she said, 'was a happy, earthly creature once. But it seems to me that I parted with earth, and the things of earth, hundreds of years ago.

'The man I loved murdered me. Nay, do not start, for though I say "murdered," the intent was as vile as the deed, but the deed itself fell short of accomplishment, by what we, in our blindness, call accident. He left me for dead—he believed me dead; and for long years I believed the same.

'I was saved by a being, mystical and strange to me, as I seem to you. She taught me all I know. She lived, unknown and undisturbed, in that dreary spot where first you

discovered me. When she died I made her tomb there amidst the wild rocks and waters that she loved, and I took her place, none questioning or approaching me.

'Alone and solitary, I gave myself up to the studies she had pursued; alone and solitary, I saw before me the web of doom that I might spin—the vengeance that I might accomplish. But I found that another hand must aid me, and I waited. I knew that in due time that hand would clasp my own—that will be mine, to mould and fashion to its destined purpose.

'In the gloom and darkness of another land, in the solitary dreariness of an old and far distant home, that young life counted its mournful days, and wept away its sorrowful hours, unknowing of the destiny to come. But the fruit falls when it is ripe, and the hour appointed came to her. Amidst the warring elements, with the seal of death upon her brow, she came to me as I in my turn

had come to another. *You*—and for a moment her sombre eyes flashed wrathfully—‘you took her from me, but my spell held her against even your power—against the prayers and tears of those she loved; and now,’ she added, her voice relapsing into the old dreamy murmur, ‘she has sought me herself. Through me alone can she gain honour, freedom, happiness. The hour is at hand when they shall all be hers. Are you content?’

Something altogether irresponsive and regardless of himself seemed to answer. He was conscious only of an absorbing anxiety—a passionate eagerness to recognise the evil force which had swayed these two dissimilar lives, and linked them together by the ties of crime and vengeance.

The woman turned aside, and bent over the motionless figure on the couch.

‘Speak,’ she said. ‘Where are you?’

‘I am with—him,’ came slowly and distinctly from the girl’s lips.

'What is he doing?'

'He writes. I cannot see the words.'

'Look.'

'I am looking. I see them now. It is to me he writes. He wishes to see me. He is coming here to-morrow.'

'It is well,' said the questioner. 'Now give some information respecting your feelings in the magnetic state, to my companion.' Then she turned to Basil and fixed her strange eyes on him. 'Ask,' she said, 'what you please; put her to any test. You will see my power is a reality.'

She withdrew to the head of the couch, where she stood like a dark shadow.

Basil, growing suddenly courageous, approached the recumbent form.

'Will you tell me,' he said, 'exactly how you feel?'

'I feel,' she said, 'as if I were in a beautiful dream. There is no pain, no sorrow, no darkness—all is light and warmth. I seem

to float to and fro in a delicious atmosphere. Nothing controls me. I go where and how I please, as a bird might, whose wings obey the impulse of its will. I am soothed and happy. There seems nothing to desire or regret.'

'Can you really go wherever you please?' asked Basil wonderingly.

There was a moment's pause; then she said slowly:

'It seems my own will; but something directs it. The inclination to go here or there is suggested. I cannot tell how. It is like a thought; and with the thought comes the accomplishment. There is no effort needed.'

'Do you know the nature of this state that holds you? Can you see yourself, and your present condition?'

'Yes,' she said readily; 'I am in a sleep, and you stand beside me. There is a shadow at my head. That is the will I must obey.'

To see her lying there with closed eyes and motionless limbs, answering him in this calm and rational fashion, gave to Basil Glendenning the strangest sensation he had ever known, or could know in all his life to come. He drew back and looked at the woman.

'I am not quite satisfied,' he said. 'She answers under your control ; her mind is only an echo of yours. Whatever oppressed or pained her, she could not betray it except by your desire. Your will is her law.'

'She is not under my control, save in that I keep her asleep,' was the answer. 'But her nature and her will are so in harmony with mine, that my very presence is sufficient to throw her into the magnetic state. She is curiously sensitive, and her life—so pure, and calm, and isolated—has left her even more than usually susceptible. To leave her as uncontrolled as you desire would be merely to leave her in her normal condition, save

that each sleep has a restorative influence upon her, and with each her mental and physical capabilities are stronger and more active. But you see I make no passes ; I utter no commands. She is as free to obey your voice when you speak, as mine. I think you are hard to satisfy.'

'If your power is so great,' persisted the boy, 'why cannot you see what you wish for yourself? Why do you send her on your errands, or require her aid in the scheme you are contemplating?'

'You are a bold questioner,' said the woman coldly ; 'too bold, methinks, for one so young. Have I not told you that a past, earth-bound and sin-stained like my own, is clogged and bound by weight of memories? She is pure, virginal, sensitive, and passive. The world has not contaminated, passion has not sullied, crime and sin have not darkened her life. Fate sent her to me. By fate our two destinies have been ruled and joined in

one common martyrdom. For her the end is near. For me'—she shuddered, and for a moment covered her wild eyes with her hands —'for me,' she went on mournfully, 'the path is dark. I see no light beyond. Yet must I tread it—led blindfold by an unseen hand.'

Then she dropped her hands, and looked mournfully down at the recumbent figure.

'But for you,' she said, 'she would have been content. The physical life had ceased to exist for her. Guided by my will, controlled by my power, there were no heights to which she might not have reached, no truths she might not have grasped. But you broke the spell. The memories of earth revived; once more love awoke, imperative in claim and impassioned in demand. Another hand swept the chords of her being, and woke anew its melody. Against those powers of longing and rebellion—that warfare of body and spirit, my own supremacy

gave way. I yielded her back to the life she desired, with all its sorrows, and temptations, and poignant sufferings. For she must suffer still ; so much I can and do foresee.'

There was a spell of silence. Basil still stood there motionless and absorbed, his eyes on the beautiful sleeper, his brain dizzy and bewildered by all he had heard and seen. Suddenly he looked up.

'Will you tell me one thing more?' he asked earnestly. 'To whom did you send her to-night?'

'To the man,' she answered, 'who has crossed her life and mine.'

Basil trembled.

'His name!' he entreated. 'Tell me his name.'

'His name,' said the voice, growing fainter now, as the shadowy figure itself grew more indistinct, 'is Pierre de Volens.'

A cold sweat broke over the boy's fore-

head. His heart throbbed painfully and fast.

‘Impossible !’ he cried. ‘You cannot know him. What is he to you ?’

There came a slow, soft, mocking laugh from the place where the shadow had stood, for it was there no longer, though it seemed to Basil as if his eyes had never left it. And far off in mid-air a voice seemed to float to him, cruel and harsh, yet with a ring of triumph in its mocking tones : ‘He *was*—my husband !’

CHAPTER V.

THE lamp died suddenly out. The storm still beat in sullen blasts against the window-panes. Alone in that room with the two sleepers, and with the woman's last words ringing in his ears, Basil Glendenning felt a sudden terror seize him. He remembered the panel, but no ray of light guided him in its direction, and he could not remember from which side of the room their entrance had been made.

With a sudden memory of his recent studies and experiences, and his influence over the girl, he gave way to the longing within him, and set his whole power of will on her awaking.

He knew he stood near the couch on which

Nancette lay, and he could only hope and wish for her awaking.

One of his favourite authors had insisted that magnetic sleep might be produced or dispelled at will. The quiescence of the brain, and the reducing its vital activity was first necessary. This would produce a passive state of mind, to be acted upon and forced into one channel of thought or desire. He had no sooner acted upon this principle—an easy enough matter in the quietude and darkness of the room, and his own overwhelming desire to be out of it—than he heard Nancette stir, and then sit up.

'Basil,' she said softly.

'Yes!' he cried in delight; 'I am here. Are you awake?'

'Have I been asleep?' she asked wonderingly. 'Where are we? Why is it all dark?'

'The lamp has gone out,' said the boy. 'And we are in [the secret room. Have

you any idea how we can get out?—there was a sliding panel, you know.'

'Where is Myra?' she questioned.

'Asleep,' answered Basil. 'Won't she be in a jolly rage when she finds she has been sent off again?'

'I can see the panel,' said Nancette suddenly. 'There is light beyond.'

'It is our own room,' he said. 'Do get us out of this black hole. It was a mean trick to leave us here in the dark.'

As he spoke the panel shot suddenly back and light streamed in. He looked at the couch. Nancette was lying back in a half-reclining attitude. She had not moved.

'Is it a conjuring trick?' he said with a little uncomfortable laugh. 'Come, let us go. I've had enough of this.'

'But Myra,' said Nancette, looking round at the chair where, bolt upright, and with hands placidly crossed on her lap, sat the figure of Mrs. Freere.

'Can you not will her to wake?' asked Basil.

The girl raised her large soft eyes in wonder.

'I? No; I have no influence over her.'

'And I'm afraid she's too heavy to carry,' said Basil regretfully, 'else we might deposit her, chair and all, in the next room.'

'Perhaps,' said Nancette, 'she will soon wake. Let us wait patiently till she does.'

'I have no objection,' he answered, 'if you are sure our trap won't close again.'

'It is quite safe,' she said; 'but, if you like, you can bring in a light. I know the spring.'

He readily followed the suggestion, and passed through the aperture into the adjoining room; then, taking one of the candles burning on the mantelshelf, he went back to the secret chamber.

'Now,' he said, 'let's have a talk. All this sort of thing is becoming very serious. Do you remember where you went in your sleep just now?'

'No,' she said; 'not in the least. I have

only a vague impression—it is like a dream one cannot remember ; but I feel, as I always tell you, rested and strengthened, almost happy, after some of these sleeps.’

‘ Well,’ said Basil, seating himself beside her on the low couch, ‘ I will tell you where you went and whom you saw.’

She turned her beautiful eyes inquiringly to his.

‘ Will you ?’ she said. ‘ Where was it ?’

‘ You went,’ he said, ‘ to that scoundrelly Frenchman—that De Volens. You said he was writing a letter to you, and that he would be here to-morrow morning.’

She started and turned pale.

‘ Did I say so ?’ she asked, trembling greatly. ‘ How strange !’

‘ Ladye Nancye,’ cried the boy fervently, ‘ I know and you know what that man is. I have never forgotten that day by the sea, and your terrified face, and his cowardly flight when he heard your husband was coming to

meet you ! I hated him then because, young as I was, I knew he had spoilt your life and made you unhappy. I believe he has been your evil genius all your life long.'

'You are right,' she said in a low, restrained voice ; 'he has.'

'And,' he went on rapidly, 'when I heard you say that, just a little while ago, I felt mad. I could not believe it.'

'It is not my fault,' said the girl piteously. 'I cannot help myself ; the woman sends me there.'

'Do you know why ?'

'No ; but I shall learn when the time comes.'

'But I know,' said the boy with passionate indignation. 'With all her powers of mind and will she cannot reach him, and she makes you—you, her messenger. Oh, Ladye Nancye, *he is her husband*. She told me so herself. Her husband ! Then what right has he to persecute you—to say such words as I heard him say, there by the sea ? What——'

Her cry cut him short. She started to her feet and faced him, pale and terrified.

‘Is it true?’ she said. ‘Are you sure it is true? Oh, I cannot believe it! Bad—vile as I know him to be, he could not so deceive me!’

‘It is true,’ replied Basil solemnly, ‘if what she says is true, for she told me.’

The girl sank down upon the couch once more, her face hidden in her shuddering hands.

‘Oh,’ she cried, ‘what an escape—what an escape! To think what I might have done—what I was almost mad, and rash, and vile enough to do that day, when you saved me! Oh, Basil—Basil!’

Her sobs broke forth unrestrained; she leant her head against the scroll of the couch; her whole frame was shaken with emotion.

‘Don’t cry,’ said the boy, his eyes flaming with indignation. ‘He’s not worth a tear.’

I told you so before, and then I did not know what I know now. Oh, Ladye Nancye, you said I might be a brother to you once. Let me be so now. Let me go to him—see him—tell him to his face what a cur and villain he is. You think I am a boy, and so does he; but I can feel and act like a man in defence of you. How dare he come to you—how dare he insult you by his presence? How dare——?’

Her hand upon his arm stayed the torrent of his words.

‘Dear,’ she said, ‘be calm. You cannot understand all, for I—oh, I could not—dare not—tell you. But, believe me, the hour of his punishment is at hand, and you shall see it.’

‘I am sick of mystery and darkness,’ cried Basil impatiently. ‘You can’t alter facts. You are Mr. Glendenning’s wife, and he—he is this mysterious woman’s husband.’

‘Yes,’ she said mournfully; ‘I know. But

he holds in his keeping a secret of mine, more precious even than life, and till I have wrested it from his grasp, and forced him to make atonement for these years of penance and suffering, I shall never be happy, nor will Errol Glendenning. You cannot cut the knot, dear, in your impetuous fashion; it must be slowly, carefully unravelled, and one hand alone can help me to do it. You must be content to wait, as I am.'

He rose and stood before her, his slight, tall figure drawn to its full height; his eyes, sombre, anxious, and appealing, resting on her tear-stained face and quivering lips.

'I must do as you wish,' he said, 'of course. But I don't think you are right; and I don't think you ought to meet or see that man again. You were fond of him once, were you not?'

'Yes,' she said with a faint little smile. 'That—expresses it well enough. No doubt you, when you were a child, were fond of

sugar, or sweets, or other alluring and cloying dainties. But now——'

'Now,' he concluded as she paused, 'they nauseate me.'

'And in like manner,' she said bitterly, 'the memory of an old folly nauseates me.'

She paused for a moment, then looked up at him.

'My knight,' she said, 'my brave young champion, you have done so much for me, you can surely do a little more. Wait—that is all I ask—only wait. Is it very hard?'

'Yes,' he said abruptly. 'It is, if that blackguard is anywhere in the way!'

'There was a story I once heard,' she said softly, 'of a minister of state, I think it was, or a diplomatist, who puzzled all his opponents by telling them the exact truth. It was not a policy they were accustomed to, but it was very efficacious. I—I think you would be like that diplomatist.'

He laughed somewhat grimly.

‘I shall certainly tell him the truth,’ he said, ‘whenever I have the opportunity.’

Her eyes flamed suddenly—a bright spot glowed on either cheek.

‘You will have it,’ she said. ‘Do not fear.’

‘Have I been asleep?’ asked Myra Freere suddenly.

The voices had ceased. She opened her eyes, and saw the two figures—the flushed and agitated faces. Nancette rose from the couch.

‘Dear Myra,’ she said, ‘you are paying the penalty of your obstinacy, I fear. It is no use to rebel. At a word or look from our mystic friend you are powerless. Basil and I have been patiently awaiting your return to your normal condition. It was all we could do.’

Myra walked across the room with a conscious and indignant look.

'It is no use denying a fact,' she said crossly. 'Pray come out of this den of witchcraft.'

They followed her in silence. Basil came last, the candle in his hand. As he stepped into the adjoining room, he turned back to close the panel, but to his surprise it was already shut, and looking at the wall from where he stood, it was impossible to detect the mode of entrance.

'It is very strange,' he said. 'How on earth did it close?'

'Oh, Bogey, of course!' exclaimed Mrs. Freere, still wrathful. 'I wonder what on earth will happen next? I shall be surprised at nothing. There is one comfort,' she added with a short laugh, 'our friend must have heard a good deal of my candid opinion respecting her and her doings. I hope she liked it.'

‘That is why she revenges herself on you,’ said Basil gravely. ‘If she chose, you would have to do whatever she wished, whether you liked it or not. I would suppress my antagonism, if I were you.’

‘I wish,’ she answered, with a comical glance of despair, ‘that you were back again at school, young man. A nice sort of education you are having.’

‘It is very interesting,’ he said. ‘And no doubt it will have its uses. You can’t say that I am idle. Haven’t I given you a strict account of my studies, and their results?’

‘Idle or not,’ interposed Nancette at this juncture, ‘the truth is simply this—that I cannot do without him yet. No doubt the life is not so healthy or so natural; but he will not need to lead it much longer.’

‘And then,’ said Mrs. Freere, ‘I advocate an expedition to the Rockies, or the Himalayas, or the interior of Arabia, to restore

tone to his system. I suppose the exploring fever hasn't died out yet, Basil ?

He smiled.

' I don't know,' he said dubiously. ' Somehow, I fancy Fenimore Cooper and Mayne Reid aren't altogether reliable authorities. Still, I hope to see a prairie yet.'

' It is a more natural desire than the pursuit of occult phenomena,' said Mrs. Freere. ' I think I shall join you'—then she looked round with a comical pretence of fear—' provided, of course,' she added, ' that I am allowed to exercise my will.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning, when Nancette urgently entreated Basil and Myra Freere to take a message from her to Léonie, the former knew well enough that she desired to be safe from interruption during the coming interview.

But he said nothing for fear of distressing her. He had a card in his own hand to play against Pierre de Volens, and he knew he could wait his opportunity. When she was left alone a change seemed to come over her face. Its soft and pathetic beauty took an expression of calm contempt; the firm lips set themselves into scornful lines. Her eyes grew dark and ominous beneath the shade of their veiling lashes.

The sun was streaming warm and radiant through the open window. The scents and colour of the springtime were everywhere appealing to her notice with their soft seduction of fragrance and beauty, but her eyes were heedless now, and all her mind was bent in strained and close attention for the first sound of that step whose lightest echo had once made her heart thrill with delight. Now it only throbbed with fear and shame.

At last the door opened, and he entered unannounced, like a welcome and expected guest. She did not rise from her seat, but motioned him to take another opposite.

'You wrote that you had an important communication to make to me,' she said. 'What is it? I must ask you to be brief. In half an hour my friends return.'

He looked at her somewhat curiously. She was not in the mood he had expected.

'Nancette,' he said in the plaintive and

aggrieved tone he well knew how to use, 'I did not expect so cold a greeting.'

Her nostrils quivered. The lines about her mouth deepened with added scorn.

'I do not know what you expected,' she said. 'You probably forget that time may have changed an unsuspecting girl into an embittered woman.'

'You must not be bitter against me,' he said pleadingly. 'Remember how I loved you, and all we might have been to one another had you but listened to my prayer two years ago.'

'I think of it,' she said slowly, 'every day I live.'

'Then you have not forgotten?'

'Oh no,' she answered in the same odd, repressed way; 'I have not—forgotten.'

'Ah,' he said, drawing a sharp, quick breath; 'I thought I had not misjudged you. Is it not strange, Nancette, that time and absence, and trouble and difficulty,

have in no way changed my love for you ?'

' I would rather,' she said, flushing hotly, ' that you did not speak of it.'

' I must speak of it,' he said passionately ; ' I cannot help it. Seeing you again has but revived the old worship—the old dreams——'

' I am glad,' she interposed, ' that you call them "dreams." I, too, have discovered they deserve no better title.'

' Dreams or not, they have sufficed to fill my life,' he said impetuously. ' We have now entered upon our third year of penance and separation, and again Fate has led my life into the shadow of yours.'

She shivered a little, and reaching up to the high mantel-shelf, took from thence a small fan or screen of Myra's work. He noted the trembling of her hand as she held the pretty toy, and added that sign of agitation to the sum which his vanity had already compiled.

He bent a little nearer to her.

‘Do you know,’ he said, ‘that your husband employed a French detective to track me only last autumn because he fancied you were with me? He traced us very cleverly from here to St. Malo, then to Rouen, then to Paris. I fancy he——’

There he paused. The screen had dropped. The passionate, indignant face turned towards him startled him into silence.

‘It is not true!’ she cried. ‘It cannot be true! How dare you say he suspected me of such infamy!’

‘Do you mean to say!’ he exclaimed, ‘that you did not know? Where were you all the time?’

With a strong effort she regained her self-command.

‘I did not know,’ she said. ‘But where I was, and why, signify nothing to you. Who set my husband on that false track?’

'His own suspicions, of course,' said Pierre de Volens airily. 'You must acknowledge they were not without foundation.'

She clasped her hands tightly; the storm raging within her breast threatened to overthrow her hard-won calmness. But she knew the time had not arrived for open defiance.

Looking at him now, she marvelled how she could ever have loved him—how even for a single hour she could have believed that mere outward charms were worthy the idealization of a girl's romantic heart. Now she felt only loathing, shame, contempt. Contempt for herself and her own weakness as well as for his cowardice and dishonour. Contempt for the mass of artifice, and treachery, and selfishness for which she had made shipwreck of her life. Alas! she was not the first woman proved guilty of such folly, or repenting it in dust and ashes too late for atonement!

‘I suppose they were not,’ she said at last, ‘though how he could have pursued such a phantom astonishes me. But is this all you wished to say?’

‘All? No; nor half!’ he cried impetuously. ‘But it is unfair to give me so short a time to do it.’

‘There are just twenty minutes left,’ said Nancette, glancing at the timepiece.

He changed colour slightly. He was playing for a high stake, and he knew he must be bold; but her manner was so strange that it held him awed and uncomfortable.

Surely he had not lost his power over her; surely nearly three years of absence and misery could but have endeared him to her memory—the clinging, trustful, passionate memory of a girl’s first love?

Assuring himself of this, and of victory yet to come, he once more essayed his actor’s arts.

'I know,' he said, 'that the terms on which you and your husband live are unchanged. I see you young, beautiful, yet widowed, as it were, by my own fault, my own folly. Nancette, I have sought you out to offer you atonement—the only atonement I can make. Claim your freedom from this man, assert your rights as a woman. I know your English laws; it can be done, it only needs a little courage. Then we may be happy together in our own way, and all these dreary years of penance forgotten.'

She listened without moving; she might have been carved in stone for any sign of life she gave. As he finished she raised her eyes. There was something in their look that struck like a sudden blow to his heart.

'You offer me my—freedom,' she said. 'What of your own?'

'My own!' Hardened as he was, his tongue faltered. 'I—I do not understand you,' he said.

Again she looked at him, and the sight of the cowardly, shrinking face smote her with a sudden, overmastering passion of shame that ever she had loved its possessor.

‘I will speak,’ she said, ‘more plainly. Is there no tie in your past that links you in bonds as firm as those you would strike from me? Is your memory too weak to recall one year in your own life, and the woman who shared it? Are you quite sure that that woman really—died—as you wished her to do?’

His face grew black and thunderous with rising passion. He started to his feet.

‘What are you hinting at?’ he cried furiously. ‘Who has been poisoning your mind against me?’

The scorn of her face died out into bitter sadness then.

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘you should know—none better. Your love was an insult to me even in my youth and ignorance. Now——’ she

shuddered—'I have learnt many lessons since then,' she went on rapidly; 'and I know you for what you are, and at last recognise the truth of my father's words.'

'So much,' he sneered, 'for a woman's love and constancy.'

'I think,' she said, with grave and gentle dignity, 'no woman could love a traitor and a coward when once she recognised the meaning of those words—when once she saw them set as a foil against the truth and chivalry of true manhood.'

'I have been slandered to you by bitter foes,' he answered, softening his voice to one of reproach, now he saw that the game was a losing one. 'I thought your love would be proof against such one-sided testimony. It is Julie, I suppose, who has turned traitor?'

He glanced covertly at her; she was not looking at him now. Her eyes were bent on the pretty feather screen that lay idly on her lap.

‘It was not—Julie,’ she said.

‘Then, in the name of Heaven, who was it?’

‘It was I,’ said a voice, low, and ‘solemn, and deep as an organ note.

He started. Standing in the full glow of the sunlight that streamed through the window was a tall figure draped in sombre black. How she had come into the room unseen, unheard, he could not tell. For a moment he stared aghast at the unexpected apparition; then he regained his self-composure.

‘And may I ask, madame,’ he said, ‘how you come to be so well acquainted with my affairs? I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance that I am aware of.’

She threw back her long, dark veil; but the ascetic face, the white hair, the strangely glowing eyes, were changed out of all likeness to what he remembered, and he looked at her as at a stranger. He bowed ironically.

‘ Madame has still the advantage of me,’ he said.

‘ You do not recognise your handiwork ?’ said the woman. ‘ I am not surprised. The years have been less hard and cruel to you, Pierre de Volens, than to me. But, changed or not, I am the girl you made your wife in Paris twenty years ago ; the girl you robbed, ill-used, and at last left for dead in the woods at Bas-Meudon. But I did not die, though for years I lost all memory and, happily for me, all feeling. I lived on, and gradually I recovered. But my youth had been murdered by your cruel hands, and I was as you see me now when once again the power to think and act came back to me. I did not seek you. I was content enough to be forgotten ; the memory of my child was faint and dim. To claim her would be to subject myself once more to your cruelty and persecution. So I let the years drift on—I and the friend who had rescued me—

and your memory became a faint and a far-off thing.'

Pierre de Volens's face was almost fiendish in its fury and suppressed passion.

'This may be a very interesting romance, he said sardonically. 'But as far as I am concerned it is a tissue of lies, and I fail to see why I am expected to listen to them.'

She lifted her hand imperatively.

'They are not lies,' she said; 'and you know it. I have the ring you gave me; I have your letters. I have proofs enough, if proofs were needed. But I make no claim on you. I only wish to save this unhappy girl from your persecution. Do you think,' she went on fiercely, 'that I do not know your object? Do you think I do not guess your reasons for following her here? But three months, and she will be in possession of that sealed packet. Ah, you start! You have discovered also what the Comte de Forèze did with his money ere leaving the Brazils.'

'Are you devil or fiend?' muttered Pierre de Volens furiously. 'How could you know this?'

'That,' she said coldly, 'is my secret, and I can keep it as well as you have kept yours.'

For a moment the murderous hate that leaped into his eyes terrified Nancette. She half rose from her chair; but the woman motioned her imperiously back.

'Do not fear,' she said. 'He cannot hurt me. I am protected against his evil wishes as against his power. Now,' she went on, turning to the furious man, 'have I said enough, or do you still doubt?'

With one last effort he tried to collect his powers of effrontery. He turned to Nancette.

'I entreat you,' he said, 'not to believe this rhodomontade. It is all false, or mere supposition. This woman was never my wife. She may have believed herself so, but she

was mistaken ; she has no more claim on me than any other harpy who may have preyed on my foolish youth. But if you are content to accept her testimony against mine'—he shrugged his shoulders significantly—'it must be so. I have the honour to wish you good-morning.'

'Stay—one moment,' said that imperious voice ; 'you have something else to do before you take your leave. You and your accomplice have lied away this girl's honour and poisoned her husband's trust. You alone can clear her in his eyes, and you shall. You must come to a place which I shall duly appoint, and you will there sign a paper that I shall dictate. This done, you may henceforth go your own way with the creature who has so long been the base and vicious tool of your evil works.'

Pierre de Volens laughed loud and long.

'Since when have you discovered that I am a fit subject for dictation or coercion?' he

asked scornfully. 'I shall sign no paper, give no promise, do no single thing that you demand. I think you are a dangerous mad-woman, and that it would be a charity to proclaim you as such.'

'It would be a dangerous experiment,' she said, her eyes flashing ominously. 'I should not advise you to attempt it. You will sign this paper, and you will also force Julie Lamontaine to sign it. For my part, I would not make a single condition for your doing it; but your cousin is foolish and pitiful still. She will pay you any reasonable terms, and the same to your accomplice, the day that her fortune is in her own hands.'

For a moment he hesitated. Again Nancette, watching him, wondered how she could ever have loved this cowardly wretch.

He turned abruptly to her.

'What is the amount of your fortune?' he asked.

She was startled.

‘I—I do not know in the least,’ she said.

‘But your husband does. You can ascertain from him.’

She flushed crimson from brow to chin.

‘He will not open the letter or the packet,’ she said, ‘until the day my father appointed.’

He stood for a moment in deep thought, watched by the scornful eyes of the two women who had, at different times, and in such different ways, loved him to their cost. To Nancette that hesitation—that discovery of many of the cruel wrongs he had done her—was the last stroke that cut adrift the cords of her foolish romance. *This* her hero, her lover, her demi-god! This wretched, cowardly, paltering creature, ready to wrest from the girl he had so cruelly deceived the very fortune that love and foresight had fenced round with such precautions! Love survives many shocks and forgives many wrongs, but

meanness is its death-blow. Nancette acknowledged that even before the shrinking, ashen face turned itself to her with a last pitiable effort at bravado.

'I will consent to do what you wish,' he said, 'for three thousand pounds paid down the day the paper is signed.'

Nancette rose then, her eyes dark with scorn, her cheeks flushed with passionate and repressed emotion.

'It shall be yours !' she said, with an imperious gesture. 'Now go !'

Without another word or look he left the room ; but there was that in his heart that might have made her tremble, could she have read its fell and dastard purpose.

CHAPTER VII.

As the door closed Nancette sank down into the chair once more, and covered her face with her hands.

For a moment the strange being watched her with compassionate eyes.

Then she approached and laid her hand gently on the girl's shoulder.

‘Do you suffer still?’ she asked gently. ‘Was I not right when I told you of his real nature? He is not worth any woman's tenderness—he never was.’

The girl raised her head. There were tears on her long lashes.

‘I do not grieve,’ she said, ‘for him, or, indeed, for myself; it is for that other. To

think that I should have wrecked his life—given him these long, cruel years of misery and suspicion to bear, and all for sake of a coward who sells conscience, heart, principle, truth, for gold! Oh,' she cried passionately, as she sprang to her feet and paced to and fro the narrow, old-fashioned room, 'it doesn't bear words—it doesn't bear thinking of!'

The woman watched her with calm, unshrinking eyes.

'I felt as you do—once,' she said. 'It seems a lifetime ago. Look how I have sunk my very identity; he did not know me. My child shrinks from me. I have lost all hold on humanity, save the fear I inspire and the power I can wield. I am a dark shadow on the brightness of love and life—a mystery that chills and terrifies. And yet I have lived up to this hour for a purpose fixed as doom, and fate has sent you to my aid. Scorn and hate are strange fruits of love; but those fruits alone have sprung from the fallen

blossoms of our broken faith. They have placed in our hands the weapons of a mutual vengeance. The day of reckoning is at hand ! Pierre de Volens will break no other woman's heart, and play no other woman false as he has played us.'

Nancette looked at her, pale and awe-struck.

'I want no vengeance on him,' she said, trembling a little at sight of the strange eyes whose spell she could never resist. 'I only want justification. I—I never knew till lately what harm he has done me in my husband's sight—with what a base and cruel lie he and his accomplice slew my honour. When Errol knows the truth, I am satisfied—I ask no more. To stand forth in his sight clear and stainless, I would sacrifice far more than that fortune which has been the sole cause of my unhappiness.'

There was a short pause. Nancette again seated herself. She had lost all dread of her

strange visitor now. She, in fact, looked upon her in the light of a benefactor.

'Can you advise me,' she said, 'how to get the money? I—I do not want to wait all those months.'

'You must ask your husband for it,' was the answer. 'He can advance it on the security of the diamonds he holds.'

'But you forget,' said the girl; 'he does not know the contents of the packet, and he will not open it till the time fixed.'

'Three thousand pounds is a large sum,' said the woman musingly; 'and you have not asked the terms of his accomplice. She may be more difficult to deal with. I think you were wrong to promise anything. Your husband will not value proofs that you must confess you had to buy.'

'But what am I to do?' she cried, in deep distress. 'They will not speak unless they are paid, and I cannot go on living under this cloud of shame and suspicion. I do not know

what Julie Lamontaine told my husband, but at least it was enough to make us strangers from that hour. I—I was so young then, and I did not know what his words meant; but Mrs. Freere told me that my folly was capable of the gravest interpretation, that it placed me outside the pale of honourable women, and gave my husband every reason to sever the tie that bound us. And I remembered his words when—when we parted, and it seemed as if a great black wall of suspicion and doubt had been built up between us, and that nothing could ever surmount it. Then you gave me hope, and I lent only too willing an ear to your promises; but now——’

Her voice broke; she clasped her hands in mute agony. There was neither pity nor softness in that inexorable face above her own. It seemed sternly set in fixed and unalterable lines.

‘You must brace your energies,’ she said at

last. 'You have to deal with subtle foes. You have proffered the bait, but—you need not pay it.'

The girl raised her white, indignant face.

'Would you make me a liar, too?' she said scornfully.

'I would have you defeat him with his own weapons. You must bring your husband here; you must let him hear for himself the confession which Pierre de Volens has to sign. Then let him decide who is to pay the price of that confession.'

The girl shuddered.

'Oh, I cannot,' she cried. 'Indeed—indeed, I dare not let them meet. Errol would kill him!'

'He would be justified,' said the woman, with a strange, cold smile. 'Men have shed blood for less cause ere this. 'I have said all,' she added slowly. 'I have shown you a way of escape—the only one. It is for you to decide whether you will take it.'

A faint sob broke from the trembling girl.

‘If I only dared!’ she said. ‘But I am afraid of Errol. I wronged him so deeply. He—I am sure he will never forgive; and to hear this—it would be only added shame.’

‘It would be better than the burden of doubt he now bears. You need not fear for him.’

Then she touched her gently on the brow.

‘Rest now,’ she said, ‘and sleep. You are weary and spent; you will need all your strength soon.’

The girl sank back in the chair. Her eyes closed. For some moments the woman watched her with a grave and serious regard that took all the wildness and mystery from her face, and left it soft and gentle.

‘Blood must be shed,’ she said mournfully. ‘I saw that when I read her fate. The hour of my vengeance is nigh. All things warn me of its approach. Only the hand that is to strike the blow is hidden. Strange that I

cannot learn that. Not hers—ah no, it is too small and fair; nor mine, for my child's curse would wither it. I feel as if every bodily impulse could exhale itself into the longing to know, and yet something holds me back. Is it fear? I, who have read the secrets of the universe, have plunged into the very organization of spirit and matter, of powers divine and mystic—I to know *fear!*'

Then slowly she moved away and stood by the secret entrance. There she paused, and once again her eyes turned to the unconscious figure in its trance of slumber. 'It must be,' she murmured dreamily. 'There is no other. The hand of fate is the hand of—Errol Glendenning.'

Meanwhile, Basil and Mrs. Freere had walked over to the little cottage where Léonie lived. The girl was wandering to and fro in the little shady garden that stood back from the highroad. She saw them

coming, and ran down to the gate to meet them.

‘We won’t come in,’ said Mrs. Freere, who had a suspicion that Pierre de Volens was within that pretty bow-windowed parlour, flooded now with spring sunshine. ‘We want you to walk down to Peter Port with us. Will you?’

‘Oh yes,’ she said readily. ‘I will just tell *gran’mère* first.’

‘Is your father here?’ asked Myra abruptly.

‘My father!’ she exclaimed in astonishment. ‘Oh no! He was in Paris when I last heard.’

Basil and Myra exchanged a hasty glance.

‘She does not know,’ said the former, as the girl passed out of earshot. ‘He wishes his visit to be a secret.’

‘I wonder why,’ said Mrs. Freere; ‘and I wonder,’ she added abruptly, ‘if Léonie knows his real name.’

'I am sure she does not,' said the boy quickly. 'It seems to me he lives two lives. He is a double-faced scoundrel, if ever there was one!'

'Hush!' said Mrs. Freere warningly; 'here is Léonie.'

'It is all right,' said the girl gaily, as she joined them. 'I have some commissions also for *gran'mère*.'

'We shall be in time to see the boat come in,' said Basil suddenly; 'this is the day.'

'Do you expect anyone?' asked the girl.

'Oh no; only I like to see them land. They look such sights.'

'That is just like a boy,' said Léonie with firm contempt. 'If you, too, suffered from *mal de mer* you would not like to be made a show of.'

'But I don't, you see. I love the water, and the rougher it is the better I like it.'

'Basil,' said the girl suddenly, her eyes on the distant sea which looked so bright and

calm in the glowing sunlight, 'should you know the place again where you found Madame Nancette?'

'Of course I should,' he answered. 'Why do you ask?'

'I thought,' she said slowly, and colouring a little as she met his look of surprise, 'that I should like to see it—that is all. Could we go there, do you think?'

'If the weather keeps all right,' he said, 'we could. But it is a rough passage.'

'I wonder how she comes to and fro,' said the girl musingly.

'Oh,' said Mrs. Freere with lofty scorn, 'the elements are of course her slaves. Probably she would say she *willed* herself here, and here she was.'

'You do not like her?' questioned the girl, fixing her dark eyes on the contemptuous face.

'Like her!' echoed Myra. 'Does one like mischief, cruelty, mystery? She is an

embodiment of all, and more. Think of those months of agony and suspense, think of Nancette's terrible illness, think of all the dark cloud of evil and incomprehensibility that surrounds us, think of a cunning that calls itself science—think of all these things as an embodiment of a being neither human nor divine, neither sane nor mad, neither comprehensible, rational, nor useful. How can "liking" possibly enter into any question in connection with her ?

'I sometimes think,' said the girl sadly, 'she is very unhappy. Life must have been very cruel to her.'

'Then she need not make it cruel for others,' said Mrs. Freere obstinately.

'Perhaps,' said the girl, 'she cannot help it.'

As she spoke, and as he looked at her, it suddenly flashed through Basil Glendenning's mind who the girl really was. He turned very pale. He remembered those words

spoken by the Mystic on the previous night. He remembered that Pierre de Volens was known here only as Pierre St. Jean, and the fact of Léonie's hitherto unknown relationship seemed to chill his former frank and brotherly feeling into a sudden horror.

‘Yet the girl could not help herself,’ he thought presently.

She was ignorant as yet of that strong tie that bound her to the woman she so generously defended, ignorant that she, too, formed a link in the chain of circumstances that now seemed to declare their first visit here, taken upon an impulse, was no mere accident, but an ordained and fated thing, whose end and purport were still shrouded in mystery, but whose every incident held some item of importance, or foretold some ominous result. The sudden change in his face and manner did not escape the girl's quick eyes. She looked at him and smiled mockingly.

'Oh, I know,' she said, 'you are no friend of hers, *mon petit chevalier*. That makes me all the more determined in my championship. You are the knight of my Ladye Nancye; there is no room in your heart yet for even a passing rival.'

'I thought you two had given up quarrelling?' said Myra, laughing.

'Bah!' said the girl, shrugging her shoulders, 'it is of no consequence. We do not quarrel—no; but we have a difference of opinion instead.'

Basil was silent and uncomfortable. He could not answer her light words lightly with this new and important discovery weighing on his mind. Léonie, the child of Pierre de Volens, was bad enough, but Léonie, the daughter of this half-crazed Mystic, whom he dreaded and yet obeyed, whose power he acknowledged even while opposing, was a creature of almost as much horror as her mother.

So he said nothing, despite her teasing speeches, but grew absorbed, and walked on beside them, and waited till their various errands were done, and it was the hour for the boat to arrive.

The pier was almost deserted when they reached it. Evidently no great number of visitors were expected. The steamer was just in, and they saw two or three people land, and the usual string of porters surround them.

‘None we know,’ said Myra Freere, half turning away. Then suddenly she started. The blood seemed to surge up to her brain. Her heart stood still. ‘Look, Basil,’ she faltered. ‘Is it—— Yes, it is. What can have happened?’

‘Whom have you discovered?’ asked the boy carelessly. He had not observed her agitation, but he also turned and looked at the little group of passengers as they separated and came slowly up the pier. ‘By all that’s

wonderful,' he almost shouted, 'it's Mr. Glendenning !'

It was true. Pale and worn, and with listless steps and indifferent eyes, Errol Glendenning was coming towards them.

BOOK VII.
RESTITUTION.

CHAPTER I.

SEEN at its best, Owl's Roost was certainly not enchanted ground, but Owl's Roost with fierce winds howling round it, and the weary splash of rain on every window, and the moan of the distant sea coming up from the rock-bound coast, was still further from being an enlivening residence.

Added to this, old Deborah, fresh in the weeds of grief and widowhood, was incessantly at her master's elbow, either entreating him to call her mistress back, and end the useless feud between himself and her, or full of omens and portents respecting the fortunes of the Glendenning.

She declared some dire trouble was at hand,

for the Ladye Nancye had taken to walking, and might be seen any night at midnight in the old gallery, just for all the world as if she had stepped out of her frame.

Errol bore it as patiently as he could. The old woman had served him faithfully and well, and he told himself it was not to be wondered at if grief and age had somewhat affected her brain. of late.

After poor old Clitheroe was buried, she seemed to lose all her energy and activity, and would sit for hours brooding over the fire, or else follow her master to and fro through the deserted house, entreating him to take his happiness while yet there was time, for the shadow of death could only be dispelled by the sunshine of love.

It was a miserable time for Errol Glendenning, and as each day dragged its dreary length along he grew more melancholy and despondent. His books had lost their attraction; no study or pursuit engrossed him as

of old. Try as he might to prevent it, his thoughts would fly to that one small island amidst the Channel waters, and his fancy followed in a thousand shapes the hours that might mean so much.

If his previous life had been as active and engrossed as that of most men, he could not have accepted the mystery and strangeness of this last year as patiently as he had done. But it had only been a studious and self-absorbed existence suddenly broken up by a storm of passion and bitter sorrow—a space of torturing memories that now haunted him like an incessant reproach.

Sometimes he told himself he might have judged her too hardly after all—that, black as the array of circumstances looked, there might have been a loophole of escape. Two years and nine months had he borne this heavy burden, teaching his heart to look only with bitterness on the fair and erring creature whom, to his cost, he loved.

Finding her stricken, suffering, broken-hearted, he had let pity master prudence, and softer thoughts replace the old pitiless horror that her very name had inspired. But the first moment of her return to reason and health had shown him the danger of such pity. He was here under the same roof where he had vowed he would not live an hour, and listening to a dangerous tempting which assured him that his wife's heart was his to win and hold for ever, if he did but choose.

Yet while matters stood on that debatable ground, while his heart was hardening itself against a fresh mistake, he knew that her hand had again launched the frail bark of his faith on the dark waters of mystery. He was alone once more. He could look back on the passage of time as on an evil dream; but, for all that, he knew the hour of awakening was at hand. And he knew also that, whether he waited till the time he himself

had fixed once in his rash arrogance, or pursued her own steps on the dark road she had taken, he could foresee no better results, or promise no possible happiness to either himself or her.

Yet, as day succeeded day, and no word reached him, of or from her, the temptation to learn the nature of her undertaking became stronger. The house was haunted by her presence. Nothing brought him forgetfulness of that, and at times an unreasoning yearning for sight or sound of her swept all prudence away.

It was a feeling he could not exorcise by any memory of treachery such as once had served him ; for had not hope been given him that such treachery might be explained, and was not his heart weak enough to let that faint whisper steal away its bulwarks of defence, and plead for truce, if not for actual reconciliation ?

In these long days and nights, he found

himself face to face with a weakness he knew was cowardly, but which nevertheless was strong enough to claim the one little luxury of self-indulgence, and the flattering sustenance of hope.

Something might happen. Myra Freere had said 'would.' But he let himself drift on the waters of uncertainty a little longer, with a small and pitiful pretence of the coming certainty of disappointment that would have been contemptible in any nature less brave and less unselfish.

In some such mood as this old Deborah would find him when she came with her endless stores of reminiscences, or ominous prophecies, or maudlin entreaties that he would make use of the present, considering we are all but 'flowers of the grass that are soon cut down,' and it is surely wiser to have our little day of sunlight and summer before that irresistible fate overtake us.

‘ I am altogether unstrung, and in a delusive condition of mind,’ he told himself after every such interview, during which he learned more of his wife’s real nature and disposition than ever old Deborah imagined, or Myra Freere had described. ‘ But perhaps it will not develop itself further, and it is not altogether unpleasant.’

It might have been in some such condition of mind that the idea first mooted itself of following his home party. At first he combated it as both useless and irrational, but again and again it forced itself upon his notice, and became a morbid and persistent tempting that it needed all his strength of mind to resist.

He went over the old ground, mentally reviewing every incident and every event from the hour when he had first brought Nancette to Owl’s Roost, and seen his day of desire quenched in black and bitter darkness, to the hour when Basil had sought him

with the news of her recovered reason and return to health.

Night after night he brooded over that melancholy history and set in array those stubborn facts. One night he sat alone in his study after a long interview with Deborah, an interview in which all his powers of ingenuity had been taxed to fence off the old woman's persistent curiosity as to the real cause of separation between himself and his wife.

When she had at last left him, he leant back in his chair tired and exhausted.

Suddenly an overmastering impulse stole over him—a longing he could not resist to look once more on that fatal scrap of paper which since his marriage night had been locked away in the secret-drawer of his study-table. The impulse grew so strong that at last he ceased to combat it, and in sheer despair went over to the hidden receptacle and unlocked the drawer. Touching a spring

at the back, a small opening was revealed, and lying there, as he had left it nearly three years before, was the little folded scrap of newspaper which had closed for him the doors of his expected paradise. His hand trembled as he drew it out. He shut the drawer, and then went back to his seat by the fire, and spread it open on his knee.

‘To the Comte de F——. Your daughter N——e is at 49, Montpelier Square, Pimlico, and has been there for a week with her cousin. Call and ask for Madame “Julie” between ten and eleven a.m. to-morrow. She has not seen advertisement.’

That was all. But that little scrap of paper had sufficed to ruin two lives very successfully, and as he read it the old horror and shame seized him in its grasp and tore his very heart-strings.

What hope could there be? What could

explain away the cruel truth he had learnt first from this source, and afterwards confirmed by an interview with the woman who had sent it ?

Again he seemed to see the dark, cruel face of Julie Lamontaine ; again he heard her assurance that the advertisement had been put in by herself in answer to the Comte de Forèze's frantic appeal to the missing girl. Again he went over the whole hateful, shameful train of circumstances, with their fatal array of evidence, and again he groaned aloud as he told himself that it was impossible she could be innocent.

She had fled from school with Pierre de Volens, had come to this woman's house with him, and there her father had found her after that week's search.

So much he had heard from Madame Lamontaine's lips—so much had been confirmed by his own search through the pile of journals that for the space of that week had

teemed with frantic appeals from the tortured father. He marvelled sometimes how these advertisements had escaped his notice, but as a rule that portion of the paper was the very last he would have thought of reading, and the Comte de Forèze had worded his appeals so skilfully that they might possibly have conveyed nothing to him had he even done so.

He threw the few lines aside now with a gesture of horror. Father and daughter had both conspired to deceive him. Finding that he must take Nancette fortuneless, Pierre de Volens had quietly retired from the contest. The sudden death of the old Count had apparently again roused his hopes. He had followed Nancette here to her bridal home in ignorance of her marriage. Her letter apparently had been one of sorrow and renunciation—the dictate of her father ere that fatal accident had deprived him of life. It had not prevented the insult of his presence here

—on the threshold of her new home—on the eve of her new life. It had only awakened the demons of jealousy and rivalry, and opened the doors of his evil nature to the baser temptings of revenge.

This was the history that Errol Glendenning read to-night by his lonely fireside. As he thought of the anguish, the heart-burnings, the pain of these past years, the shadows seemed to deepen on his face, the lines round brow and lips grew hard and stern.

'I have cheated myself,' he said in a hoarse whisper. 'Nothing can wash away the stain; nothing—nothing—nothing!'

Then his head sank on his folded arms, and all the room grew still, as if indeed the very shadows were listening, hushed, and dark, for some outward sign of that heart-breaking anguish.

It might have been a long or short time that passed—he did not know; he did not

even hear the loud and solemn strokes of a distant clock that struck the hour of midnight.

But suddenly there came through the room a swift, sharp blast of air, and with a low, wailing cry of intense fear, a figure fell at his feet, clasping and clinging to him, and filling the room with shrill cries and sobs of terror.

‘Master—master! I have seen her again! She sent me here. She is following me. Look—look! there she stands—pointing, always pointing! Oh, master, for the love of heaven, go to my lady! Something dreadful threatens her, I know. Oh, listen to the warning before it is too late. Indeed, indeed ’tis sent for you. Oh, can’t you see her? Look—there again! How she wrings her hands. Again she points seawards. Oh, master, listen before it is too late!’

‘My good Deborah,’ he said soothingly, as he tried to raise the trembling old figure,

'you have been dreaming, and are alarmed. Believe me, there is nothing there—nothing.'

She let him raise her and place her in a chair. She was shaking from head to foot; her white hair hung wildly about her face; she was only clad in her flannel bed-gown.

'I tell you, master,' she repeated, 'it is a warning, and you must obey. Three times has she come to me and told me you must go; and to-night she forced me from my bed and sent me here. Look here at my wrist, where she touched me; 'tis as if a live coal rested on it. Oh, master, I cannot rest nor sleep for thinking that my lady wants you. You know the story. When danger or death threatens the wife of a Glendenning, so surely does the Ladye Nancye walk and give warning. Three times has it been given to me. If you do not heed my words to-night, you will repent it to your dying day!'

Strangely moved by the old woman's in-

tense earnestness and terror, Glendenning stood there beside her in silence. Full well he knew the legend, but still he was more inclined to believe that old Deborah was under the influence of a dream.

‘If there were danger as you say,’ he answered at last, ‘why does not the ghost come to me? I am the person most nearly concerned.’

‘You do not believe,’ said Deborah, still trembling. ‘It is not given to all to believe, or to see.’

It flashed suddenly across Errol Glendenning’s mind that one of his favourite authors had made the observation that ghosts never do go about their business like other people ; but instead of warning those most nearly concerned in any impending calamity, usually address themselves to somebody who has nothing to do with the case in point.

‘Well,’ he said at last, ‘if it will set your mind at rest I will go to her. I will start

to-morrow. But,' he added gravely, 'who is to take care of you? You can't remain here alone with the ghosts.'

'I do not fear them,' she said. 'It is only what they foretell.'

The shadow deepened on Errol Glendenning's brow.

'Surely,' he said, 'enough of evil and sorrow has already fallen on this unhappy house. Fate must have exhausted her weapons, I should fancy.'

The old woman rose, and laid her trembling hands upon his arm.

'My dear master,' she said earnestly, 'the hour is ever darkest before the day breaks. Be advised by me this once. Go to your wife while yet there is time, and take your happiness from her hands. I can't read the warning quite plain, but I seem to know what it is meant for. Scripture shows us that the dead can rise and walk, if so be God intends it for a wise purpose. He has warned

you through me. 'Tis the third time and the last.'

'Hush! say no more,' said Errol. 'I have told you I will go.'

The morning of the second day found him at Guernsey.

CHAPTER II.

THE astonishment of Myra Freere and Basil, when they saw Errol Glendenning walking up the landing-stage, was beyond the expression of words.

He greeted them with some embarrassment. One cannot well speak of ghostly warnings and apparitions in the clear, laughing sunshine of a spring day. The hand of Nature seems to sweep aside the dark veil of mystery, and to turn fears and portents into a jest.

But for a moment a sense of unreality stole over him as he clasped Myra's trembling hand, and looked down at her white face and dilated eyes.

‘Are you all well?’ he asked, and unconsciously his eyes turned from their faces and wandered anxiously around.

‘Well? Yes, I should think so,’ cried Basil heartily; but Myra’s white lips could frame no words. It frightened her that she should so have lost self-control; but she knew, even while that spell of fear held her in its grasp that it had passed unnoticed, for something anxious and uncertain overpowered his energies, and brought him no sense of the nearness or reality of her presence—only the vague, disappointing chill that follows on expectancy unrealized.

‘No doubt,’ he said, ‘you never dreamt of my coming here; but I have heard nothing of you all, and Owl’s Roost was very gloomy. I had a sudden whim to run over and see you. How is—how is Nancette?’

‘She is very well,’ said Myra. ‘She is at home. We have a very romantic-looking domicile, but space is somewhat limited.’

Errol Glendenning's face grew cold and stern.

'I am not going to intrude,' he said icily; 'you need be under no fear. I am now on my way to the hotel. I am used,' he added bitterly, 'to being regarded as a visitor.'

'Let me introduce you to Miss St. Jean,' said Basil hastily, turning to Léonie, who had been looking on in some surprise.

Errol merely bowed, and then they walked on together in the wake of the luggage-porter.

When they were out of earshot of the young folks, Myra turned hastily to her companion.

'Why have you come?' she asked hurriedly. 'You had some special reason, I know.'

'You will smile if I tell you I was frightened into it,' he said, with a short, hard laugh. 'Deborah declares that the family ghost has been walking and moaning, and

that some dire calamity impends. She insisted on my coming here. That is the simple truth.'

'It does not sound cheerful,' said Myra Freere; 'but it is well to know you are at hand.'

'I had rather,' he said coldly, 'that you did not tell Nancette, if—if you fancy the news will be unwelcome.'

'Oh no,' she said; 'it is not that—pray do not fancy that; but she is anxious to justify herself, and that is not to be easily or readily done.'

'I am content,' he said gloomily, 'to wait her pleasure.'

Her eyes flashed up to his in sudden eagerness.

'Oh,' she cried, 'I am glad of that! Indeed you will be rewarded for the exercise of patience.'

He sighed involuntarily.

'Three years,' he said, 'is a long time.'

'It is nearly over now,' she answered softly, 'but you are right. It is a long time to bear unhappiness and suspense.'

'You talk,' he said, 'as if you fancied there might be an end to it, but I hold no such hope. I have been over the old ground again. I can find nothing to justify her; I could not have acted differently without forfeiting my own self-respect.'

'And yet,' she said quickly, 'you are here.'

'It seems irrational, but if my presence can avert harm or danger, it is as well to be of some use while I can.'

'I wonder,' she said, her voice low and anxious, 'if you have no fear for yourself.'

'Why should I?' he asked quickly. 'My life is not of much value. It has been efficiently wrecked. There is no anchorage left for hope.'

'Do not say that,' she said pleadingly. 'I have told you——'

‘You have told me what you believed,’ he interrupted, ‘but you forget I have no faith.’

‘You wrong yourself. Some day you will be glad that I at least credited you with what you denied.’

‘You are good enough,’ he said gently, ‘to credit anyone you care for with better qualities than they possess. So you have gone through life happily.’

For a moment the irony of the words struck home to her with a keen sense of inward pain. So long he had known her, and yet had never learnt to read aright the faithful heart, the brave, true nature ! Presently she smiled.

‘I am glad,’ she said, ‘you think I have gone through life happily. Some people are easily content, you know. I must be one of them. I—I was never anxious to experience deep emotions. Life is more comfortable without them, I fancy.’

'You are fortunate,' he said, 'to have avoided what you disapproved.'

'I often make that remark to myself,' she answered. 'And now, having satisfactorily disposed of my idiosyncrasies, let me ask when you intend to favour our establishment with a visit?'

'You have not yet told me where it is,' he said gravely, 'nor whether it would be advisable to let Nancette know of my arrival.'

She looked up quickly.

'Did you think of keeping that a secret?' she asked.

'I did not think anything about it at all. I came on impulse. It won't bear explanation, but you are very good not to laugh at it.'

'I should not think of doing that,' was the grave answer, 'for I, too, have become a convert to mystery. Our friend in black has been kind enough to pay me some attention.'

‘Then she does really exist—that woman?’

‘She really does. If she gives you as tangible proof of her powers as she has done me, you will be inclined, perhaps, to consider that existence a questionable benefit. I do. But here is the hotel. Are you going in?’

‘Only to make the necessary arrangements. Then, if you permit, I will accompany you to the domicile of limited space.’

She flushed suddenly and uncomfortably.

‘Of course,’ she said. ‘You are at liberty to make your own arrangements with Nancette. Only I thought——’

‘Do you suppose,’ he said, ‘that I am not perfectly aware what you thought, and that the “liberty” you speak of has not a different interpretation to yours?’

‘What are you waiting for?’ asked Basil, as he came up to Mrs. Freere after Errol

Glendenning had entered the hotel. 'Is he coming back with us?'

'Yes,' she answered quietly. 'Did you suppose he would not?'

Basil shrugged his shoulders.

'Hard to say what he will do,' he said. 'All the same, I don't think Nancette will like it.'

Myra Freere was silent. She knew very well that Nancette would not like it, but she did not say so.

'Where has Léonie gone?' she asked suddenly.

'I think,' said Basil, 'she felt *de trop*. Don't you admire the ease and grace with which I introduce French phrases? At all events, she took herself off some minutes ago, saying that she would go to the High Street.'

'Why did you not go also?' inquired Mrs. Freere.

'She said she did not want me. You

know what Léonie is. By Jove!' he added suddenly, 'if they should meet!'

'They! Who?' asked Mrs. Freere, looking at him in surprise.

'Mr. Glendenning and De Volens,' he said in a low, hurried voice. 'You know he is there this morning?'

'He must have left long ago,' said Mrs. Freere somewhat anxiously. 'I hope so. Basil, you might—you could go in advance, could you not? It would never do for your guardian to meet him there. You are quite right.'

'I see what you mean,' said the boy quickly; 'I'll run on as advance-guard and give warning. You must walk slowly,' he added, turning to her. 'Sprain your ankle if he's in too great a hurry.'

Then he rushed off, and Myra remained by the hotel-porch, alone with her anxious thoughts.

'He ought not to have come,' she said. 'It is most unfortunate.'

She was trembling and unnerved.

That sudden meeting had been to her more than she could possibly have dreamt. Her usual calmness and self-command seemed to have forsaken her. She was only conscious of a presence that had always meant for her something that no words could convey.

Yet when she heard his steps and his voice, she found herself to be what he had always known her.

In calm friendliness she resumed the conversation, and walked beside him through the irregular and badly-paved streets which led into the interior of the island.

'It is rather a long walk,' she said apologetically. 'I hope you do not mind that?'

'Shall we drive?' he asked, glancing at a passing carriage.

'Oh no!' cried Myra, frightened out of all composure. 'I mean,' she went on more calmly, 'I enjoy walking, and it is such a

lovely day, and I'm sure you won't be sorry for some exercise after your journey.'

'You are right,' he said. 'Besides, only happiness has need to be impatient. I am merely going to make a morning call as—as any other stranger might.'

'I can't bear to hear you speak so bitterly,' said Myra, her voice low and full of pain. 'I never thought it could have lasted so long. I gave you a year.'

'There are cases,' he said, 'for which time does very little.'

'But you would forgive her if you saw—I mean if she could prove to you that that fatal week had been after all innocent—if you knew that for some vile purpose of her own Julie Lamontaine had deceived you? The girl had been trapped into that house and there detained. It was done to win her father's consent. Pierre de Volens made a bold stroke for—for that fortune he coveted. When it failed, can you not understand he

would try, and his accomplice would try, to make you think the worst—for the sake of revenge, if for nothing else ?

Errol Glendenning's face grew white.

'You put it in altogether a new light,' he said. 'I have not considered it in that way. But still, even were it a certainty and not a supposition, the facts remain that she loved this man ; that she was ready to marry him ; that I was used to cloak her error, if not her shame. You cannot argue them away.'

'It was a girl's foolish fancy,' she said, 'for a handsome face and a flattering tongue. Long—long ago she has repented it.'

'And can you assure me,' he said earnestly, 'that she has never met this man since—since that day I know of—that it was not to see him she came here last summer ?'

'She has never seen him of her own free will,' said Mrs. Freere earnestly. 'Remember all this time I have never left her side except during the terrible weeks that she

was lost to us, and I think you had evidence enough that she was in safe keeping then. I have studied her nature; I have read the secrets of her heart—its sufferings, its sorrows, its patience. Believe me, Errol, you are voluntarily throwing away your own happiness if you persist in keeping her a stranger to yourself.’

‘Do you think,’ he said, and his voice sounded hoarse and unsteady, ‘that I could throw it away if it were possible to hope—if I dared to hope?’

‘Ah,’ she said, ‘you love her—I knew you did! Why do you try to fight against it?’

‘Because it has made me a coward,’ he answered passionately. ‘Because an experience like mine is enough to shake a man’s faith for evermore. I could not’—and he set his lips firm in one rigid line—‘I could not go through it again—it would make a brute of me.’

'I am glad of that confession,' she said. 'I thought you were unlike most men. You mean you would like to kill her—or him.'

'I am afraid to say what I mean.'

She looked at him with a curious mixture of questioning and defiance.

'I suppose,' she said, 'it never occurs to you that anyone else has suffered as you do, and yet lived on without discussing suicide or—murder, in a personal fashion.'

'You mean that I am selfish—morbidly selfish. I fear so myself. But you must confess life has been hard on me.'

'Is it not hard on all?' she cried, with a ring of passion in her voice that startled him. 'Do we not suffer, too? We women—toys of your idle hours—sport of your fancy, who must smile, and laugh, and bend to your will, and hide even misery lest it spoil our charm for you!'

'Myra!' he cried in bewilderment.

'Have I startled you?' she said, resuming

her natural calmness by a strong effort. 'Don't look so alarmed. It was only a bit of the old temper. You know you always said I had a temper when I was a girl.'

But the question in his eyes brought the hot blood to her cheeks.

'It was an honest temper,' he said gently; 'frank, brave, outspoken like yourself. Have I known you all these years only to find that I have not known you, after all?'

'It was quite an impersonal case, I assure you,' she said; but there was a tremor in her voice, and he heard it.

'That is saying a great deal for your powers of sympathy,' he answered. 'It occurred to me that you might once have—suffered.'

'Once!' she echoed. 'Perhaps you are right. But it hurt no one but myself.'

'Yet you can think of it—think of it so that its memory hurts you still.'

'Oh,' she said lightly, 'do not try to gauge the shallow depths of a woman's experience. Half of it is fanciful.'

'Most women's, perhaps; but not yours. Yet I have always pictured your life as being serene and cloudless.'

'Of course you pictured it correctly,' she said. 'Don't try to change your views.'

'I will not,' he answered gravely, 'for it would make me unhappy. And, now you have reduced me to a proper frame of mind for listening to advice, tell me what I had best do when—when I reach the domicile.'

What she told him, and what he listened to, took up the intervening space of time until they reached the wooden gates of the quaint old house in its shady hollow.

Leaning over them, and swinging to and fro, was Basil.

He jumped off and held them open.

'I am sorry,' he said, 'that I am the only

one at hand to welcome you. The Ladye Nancye is out at present.'

The announcement came almost as a relief to Errol. He held the gate open for Mrs. Freere to enter, and glanced inquiringly at her.

'Shall I wait?' he asked. 'Perhaps I had better wait, now I am here?'

'Yes,' she said mechanically, and then walked on up to the house in silence.

The fact of Nancette's absence struck on her coldly, and with a new and inexplicable sense of danger; she had distinctly said that she would not leave the house that morning.

They had a primitive luncheon in the old parlour, and spent another hour or two strolling about the grounds and the neighbouring fields. The afternoon waned, yet still Nancette did not return. Myra Freere grew uneasy, Basil uncomfortable, Errol's brow stern, and a certain restraint seemed to fall upon them all.

Five o'clock struck. The old serving-woman brought them some tea, and lit the lamp. Then Mrs. Freere suddenly thought of questioning her.

'What time did madame go out?' she asked curiously.

'It was close on midday,' was the answer. 'About half an hour after the gentleman left.'

Errol started.

'The *gentleman*!' he said. 'What gentleman?'

'A gentleman came to see madame. She seemed to expect him. She told me if anyone called to show him in here.'

Errol Glendenning turned to Myra.

'I was not aware,' he said coldly, 'that you had gentlemen visitors. Can you tell me his name?' he added suddenly, turning to the old woman.

'No, monsieur. He was tall, and handsome, and dark. He had an air of assur-

ance — of confidence — as if he were well expected ; but he gave no name.'

'That will do,' said Glendenning curtly.

And as the woman left, he glanced at Myra's troubled face.

'You were right to say I should need faith,' he said. 'I have not had to wait long for a test.'

Another hour. The suspense was growing unbearable. Basil suddenly started up.

'Perhaps,' he said, 'she is in the secret room—asleep.'

He went over to the wall and touched the spring which he had already discovered. One glance was sufficient. The room was tenantless.

Again they waited. Again another hour struck, dull and ominous, as the darkness crept on apace. Then dread and fear began to speak out, and they gathered round the

window pale and anxious, and peered with straining eyes into the deepening dusk.

'Can she guess I am here, and be avoiding me?' thought Errol Glendenning.

'Something must have happened,' Basil muttered again and yet again.

Myra Freere alone stood there, like a statue of despair, incapable of thought or action.

The night passed; the dawn broke chilly and gray, with wind and rain. It found them still there—watching—waiting.

Nancette had not returned.

CHAPTER III.

A THIN gray vapour lay upon the sea, and the rain fell in heavy, leaden drops.

An incessant strife as of waves and water seemed to fill the air. It seemed to Nancette that she had heard nothing else for many days and nights, when she awoke from a long sleep, and first looked round.

She was quite alone, and all about her was wrapped in profound darkness.

She sat up, her senses alert and wideawake. The sound of the sea puzzled her. She knew it was unusual, and could not imagine why it should reach her with such distinctness. As her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, she perceived a dull red glow, like the

last light from an expiring fire, a short distance off. She rose. She then found she was entirely dressed, and her amazement and bewilderment increased.

Her feet struck on a cold, earthy floor, and a sense of chill and dampness seemed in the air, such as is inseparable from underground places. With a feeling of overmastering terror she cried out. A voice answered her soothingly. A light flashed from the gloom, and she saw the form of the Mystic standing beside the dying embers.

'Why am I here?' cried the girl in terror. 'Where are Myra and Basil?'

'I brought you here for a purpose,' came the calm answer. 'It was destined. The hour is at hand.'

'It is cruel of you to force me here and there at your will,' she almost sobbed. 'I was in the old parlour, I remember. Where am I now? On the island still?'

'You are in my home,' she said—'the only

home that human charity has left me. Do you not remember it ?

She threw something on the fire and it sprang into flame, and then she turned up the light of the lamp that stood on a shelf of rock by her side.

Nancette looked round.

She had no memory of the place or the days she had spent in it, but a feeling of dread, and rebellion, and passionate indignation seemed suddenly let loose within her, and she turned in bitter indignation to her companion.

‘ I did not wish to come here,’ she cried. ‘ By what right have you brought me ? Does Myra know where I am ?’

‘ No,’ said the woman ; ‘ no one knows save I, and he whom Fate is sending. The hour is close at hand. You have not long to wait for freedom.’

‘ I—I cannot understand you,’ faltered the girl, shrinking back with sudden horror from

the strange, weird face and flaming eyes.

'Who is coming?'

'Your enemy and mine.'

'Not Pierre!' cried the girl. 'You have not brought him here? For Heaven's sake, don't say that!'

'He comes of his own free will,' answered the Mystic. 'For his own evil purpose. He has tracked me here. He has bribed the one creature who had my secret, and who knows every channel and current of these treacherous waters. I could have stayed him had I wished. I could have given him to death again and again; but I leave him to the fate he braves.'

Nancette's terrified eyes peered through the darkness and gloom of the cavern. How she longed for Basil; his cheery voice, his bright young face, the sense of security and protection that his presence always gave her!

The longing framed itself into a prayer

that bridged space and distance with the strongest impulse of yearning her heart had ever known. Then she sank down on the pile of rough skins by the fire, trembling still with the fear and horror of this uncanny place.

She knew it was useless to struggle. Her only dread was that the iron will might chain her once more into the helplessness of sleep. She crouched there, silent and shrinking, while the sound of the sea seemed to roar like an advancing torrent, and it seemed to her that the ground beneath her throbbed and rocked with the blows of the hissing waves.

Suddenly a light touch fell on her shoulder. She looked up. The woman stood there, her face white as death, her eyes dark and burning with the concentration of intense desire.

‘He is here,’ she said. ‘I would not have him see you. Go yonder.’

Nancette sprang to her feet, and hurried to the shadowy depths of the small inner cave where she had first found herself.

It was quite dark. She crouched panting and breathless on the pile of rugs which had formed her resting-place. The woman drew herself up, a strange weird figure in her robe of black and girdle of flaming red.

The fire burnt dull and fitfully. There was but one small ring of light in which she stood—stern, and calm, and rigid as a figure of stone.

Gradually the noise of the sea seemed to subside. Nancette felt that all her powers of sight and sense were concentrated in expectancy. Then she became conscious of approaching footsteps; nearer and nearer they came, waking a dull echo in the vaulted archway; pausing, then advancing, finally ceasing altogether as again the thunder of the breaking waves seemed to fill the air.

The blood seemed to forsake her heart.

She was conscious almost to pain of a presence that as yet was only a shadow—a shadow that stood before her in the distance outlined against a circle of blood-red light. She saw the face, and life and sense grew numbed in the shock of that brief instant. But they came back with a rush of madly-leaping pulse and throbbing heart, as the deep calm tones of a remembered voice came full and distinct to her ears.

‘ I have come to you for news of my wife. Where is she ?’

It was Errol Glendenning who stood there in that ring of light. It was his voice that broke the spell of terror, and seemed to fill her veins with a rush of joy—a sense of safety.

The woman drew back, and looked at the lofty figure, the stern and serious face, the grave, compelling eyes.

‘ Who are you ?’ she cried involuntarily.

‘ I am the husband of the girl you have

made your slave,' he said sternly. 'She disappeared on the day of my arrival in Guernsey. We have tracked you here. Is she with you? If so, I demand a cessation of your arts. I will not have her victimised by a cruel and useless force.'

'My power is not useless, neither is it cruel,' came the answer. 'But for me, your wife, as you misname her, would never have regained reason or health. It is true I have made her serve me, but it was for a good purpose, as you yourself will acknowledge.' Then a strange smile came over her lips. 'Would you like,' she asked, 'to hear for yourself the cruel plot to which she fell a victim? Would you like to be convinced at last that you have given her, as well as yourself, an unnecessary martyrdom? The opportunity is at hand. Fate has served you well.'

'I want nothing,' he said impatiently, 'but news of her welfare. Is she with you?'

‘Yes,’ was the unexpected answer ; ‘but you cannot see her yet. Learn first if my power is to be scoffed and scorned at. Stand within this nook. Your enemy is at hand.’

Again came the sound of hurrying steps. Then another figure entered, dripping, wild, haggard, with bloodshot eyes and face of ashy pallor.

‘So, madame, I have found your hiding-place. A safe enough one, as I live!’

The woman drew slowly back into the circle of outer gloom.

‘Why are you here?’ she demanded. ‘Do you value your life so little?’

He laughed shrilly.

‘As little as I value your threats,’ he said, and tossed aside his cloak with an air of contempt.

From the breast of his under-coat glittered the barrel of a pistol. She noticed it and smiled.

'Is it to be a repetition of Bas-Meudon?' she said with scorn.

'Yes,' he answered, 'it is, unless you consent to my terms. I told you once before I do not brook dictation. You forced my cards on the last occasion we met. This time, I flatter myself, I can play my own game in my own fashion.'

'You have come here,' she said tranquilly, 'at the peril of your life.'

'And piloted,' he interpolated, 'by your own boatman. A curious taste truly, this submarine residence of yours. You kept your secret well, I must say.'

'I had need,' she said. 'You were a pitiless foe.'

'You are not polite,' he scoffed. 'You should have remembered the sacredness of marital rights. I—I might have been tempted to commit that error a second time. I nearly did once, but fortunately stopped

short of actual criminality. That was your fault, madam.'

'You acknowledge,' she said, 'that I was your wife. You denied it once.'

'As we are alone and no one can hear our exchange of confidences,' he answered with a mocking laugh, 'I am ready to acknowledge anything reasonable. However, that is not the object of my visit. I have drawn up that document, for signing which I am to receive three thousand pounds.'

'Yes,' she said; 'I should like to hear it.'

He drew a rough wooden seat up to the fire.

'It is very interesting,' he said. 'Judge for yourself.'

She drew back a step or two, watched furtively and vindictively by those cruel eyes.

'I am chilled to the bone,' he continued, and drew a flask from his pocket and drank

off the contents. 'Now, madame, are you ready?'

For all answer, she took the folded paper that he handed, and spread it slowly out.

'You shall read it,' he said, 'and I hope it will satisfy your requirements.'

She held the paper in the radius of the light, and slowly, distinctly, like the voice of doom, the words fell in the silence of the gloomy cave.

'I, Pierre de Volens, do herewith assert that I have misrepresented certain facts relating to Mdlle. de Forèze, now Mrs. Errol Glendenning. It is true she left her school at my command, but only to stay under the roof of Madame Lamontaine, whom I represented as a friend. I forced her to do this in order to win her father's consent to our marriage. When he discovered her, however, he still refused it, and absolutely declined to give her the fortune which was her right, and on receiving which I had

counted. There was nothing, therefore, for me to do but to withdraw from the contest, and wait till time should soften the rancour of M. de Forèze, or his daughter should win his consent. Neither event happened. Instead, I received a letter from mademoiselle, my cousin, informing me that her father was dead, that she had found another guardian, and was about to bestow her hand upon him. In alarm I returned to England, and followed them to some desolate and terrible place on the Cornish coast, only to learn I was too late—they were married.

‘I was a man of the world, and a Frenchman. But one thing was left me—revenge on the husband of my cousin. I returned, and for a time I waited. The opportunity came sooner than I had imagined possible. Monsieur, the husband, made a discovery that there was a week in his young wife’s past history which was mysterious enough to require explanation. He demanded

—she refused it. He did what I had imagined was possible. He found Madame Lamontaine, and heard from her lips the story I had dictated. It was not a pleasant story for an English husband to hear, but it had its use—it effectually severed the tie so rashly formed, and made them strangers. I now confess that Mdle. de Forèze herself was entirely ignorant of the compromising circumstances of her flight. She was as innocent and credulous as a child, and believed anything I told her. But her imprudence looked guilty enough to serve my ends, and Errol Glendenning was as credulous as herself. If this statement will help to clear her in his eyes, he is welcome to it. My purpose is served. I have had my vengeance.'

The voice ceased. In that pause the sullen sound of the sea seemed nearer and more distinct, but each member of that strangely-met group was too absorbed to heed it.

The woman placed the paper on the rough wooden table by her side.

‘You have not signed it,’ she said quietly.

‘Have you the money?’ he asked.

‘No,’ she answered. ‘Nor do I intend that you shall receive it.’

He turned and looked at her.

‘You and I, madame,’ he said, ‘are well acquainted with each other. I think you know that I am not to be trifled with.’

‘I remember,’ she said with a strange smile, ‘the wood at Bas-Meudon. That deed has sat lightly enough on your conscience all these years. I see you have a weapon with you, and I am a woman, alone and unprotected. But I am not afraid. It is not destined that my death comes from your hand, though long ago you murdered all that made life of any worth.’

He rose to his feet and pushed the chair aside. His face looked dark and evil in the uncertain light. The fire had died down—

there was only the flickering flame of the lamp, making a small spot of brightness in the surrounding gloom.

She looked at him unflinchingly.

'You will sign this paper,' she said, 'and you will leave it with me. I make no conditions.'

'I will not sign it !' he answered threateningly. 'Nor will I give it up save for the money Nancette promised. When that money is in my possession she may have the document—perhaps.'

Then a low, strange laugh left her lips.

'What if I tell you it has served its purpose,' she said—'that you have justified her in the eyes of the only man to whom such justification was necessary? Errol Glendenning has heard your confession. See—there he stands! Vengeance—you talk of vengeance! Nay, Pierre de Volens, it is his turn now—and mine !'

For an instant the terror of a coward

showed itself in every line of the craven, ashy face.

He saw the trap into which he had fallen, and the utter futility of his own schemes flashed upon him in that brief instant.

Beside him stood the victim of his evil youth, and before him the man whose life he had cursed with the basest and cruellest lie that ever hate and revenge could have invented.

He was no longer alone with a helpless woman, but faced and defied by a man burning with passionate indignation, with long-borne suffering, with hate, and shame, and bitterness long held in leash, and now unloosed in the sudden brutality that the mere sight of this mocking foe had fired within his heart. For a moment life seemed to grow dark and meaningless. He expected no mercy; he had played his last card in foolish bravado. He had come here to work his base vengeance on the woman who had

outwitted his own schemes, and now he was caught in the toils he had himself spread.

All this flashed through his mind as that dark, stern face confronted him like a threat of doom, and low and distinct the voice of the one man whom most he feared came to his ears.

'Stand aside ! I can avenge my own wrongs now !'

The woman moved away. The two men stood within that circle of light, and for a second's space their eyes flashed hatred and defiance. Then, swift as thought, Pierre de Volens's hand was at his breast. There was a flash, a loud, dull ring, and then the shriek of a woman's voice and the rush of hurrying feet.

Simultaneous with that murderous report came the roar and thunder as of a loosened torrent. The very floor and walls of the cave shook and quaked ; the sound was on all sides ; and from the sloping entrance-way

a foaming, whirling mass of water leapt down into the cave, and dashed over the earthen floor.

Two terrified women were bending over a motionless figure. They started, and looked with horror at the foaming water.

‘The sea has burst through!’ cried the strange owner of this retreat. ‘Fly—fly for your life!’

At the same instant a figure leaped across the span of darkness that curtained another outlet; a lantern flashed through the gloom.

‘Nancette,’ cried Basil’s voice, ‘you here! Where is Mr. Glendenning?’

Then his eyes fell on the prostrate figure. There was no time for word or question. He thrust the lantern into the girl’s hands, and seized the motionless form in his strong young arms.

‘Follow me, for Heaven’s sake!’ he cried. ‘The ground rises here. There is an outlet

at the top of the cliffs. It is your only chance.'

Deafened and terrified by the roar of the water, the weird gloom, the sudden appearance of her young champion, Nancette hurried after him. That deep, hoarse roar filled the air, and the water seemed rising and foaming against the rocks over which she stumbled, blind with haste and terror.

But soon the way grew smoother ; it was a steep incline ; and here and there came gleams of light, faint and indistinct, but speaking of that hopeful outer world from which they were separated. Panting, breathless, stumbling, she hurried on.

Once or twice Basil stopped, overweighted by his burden ; but it seemed as if superhuman strength had come to him.

As the ground grew steeper and more difficult to ascend, Nancette lent her aid, weak as it was, and supported the head of the unconscious man while Basil toiled man-

fully on with the weight of the body taxing every energy.

At last a ray of light shone clear and distinct through an aperture above. Basil gently placed his burden on the ground, and then pushed back the block of stone, which of old he had used to close the entrance he had discovered. Then he assisted Nancette out, and between them they raised the still unconscious man, and laid him down on firm ground in safety.

For some moments neither of them spoke. They had neither breath nor strength. A cold, damp wind was blowing from the sea. The tumult of the waters below was deafening. The moon showed faintly through a veil of black cloud, and afar off a red light gleamed like a signal from the sea—the light of the steamer which had brought Errol Glendenning thither under Basil's direction.

The moment the boy recovered breath, he

bent anxiously over his guardian's still motionless form.

'What happened to him?' he asked Nancette pantingly. 'I thought I heard a shot. I was coming to warn them of the water rising.'

'He has been shot!' sobbed the girl. 'See how the blood streams out. Oh, what can we do?'

'Shot!' echoed Basil. 'By whom—the woman?'

'No. By Pierre de Volens.'

'That coward! He there! Nancette, were you with him?'

'No,' she cried. 'He only came a moment or two after—after Errol. He never saw me. But we waste time in words. Can't we do something to stop this dreadful bleeding?'

'Tear some strips off your dress, or petticoat,' said the boy, as he carefully unloosened Errol Glendenning's collar and shirt.

'He has been shot through the breast!' he

cried suddenly. ‘ Good Heavens ! what are we to do ? We can’t get help till daybreak. Look at the sea. It is like a boiling cauldron.’

Nancette said nothing. Her pale young face was set in rigid despair. Mechanically she tore the soft cambric into bandages, and with what skill they could they stanchd the blood. She sank down on the cold, wet stones, and laid her husband’s head upon her lap, and there, like a mute statue of despair, sat and listened to the wild wail of the wind and stormy beat of the sea till the dawn broke. Strangely enough, it was only when the dawn did break that either of them thought of the woman, or remembered that she had been left behind amidst the rising waters.

‘ But she must be safe ! ’ said Basil. ‘ She has lived there so long, and of course she knows every outlet.’

At this moment Errol opened his eyes.

A shudder ran through his frame. With a sudden effort he tried to rise, but his limbs felt numb and powerless. It seemed to him that a face more of heaven than of earth looked back at him from the mists of his clouded fancy. Speech was an effort. But the divine compassion of the eyes that met his own swept away all memory of pain and anguish, and thrilled his heart as with the promise of love, and life, and joy. Feebly he raised his hand, and strove to clasp her own.

'Nancette?' he murmured. Then again his eyes closed; a strange gray look stole over his face.

A bitter cry rang out from Nancette's lips.

'He is dead!' she cried. 'Dead through my fault—for my sake! Oh, Heaven be merciful! Let me die, too!'

CHAPTER IV.

As the red glow in the east deepened, the wind seemed to lull, and the sea grew calmer. The surf still tossed upon the shingle, the waves swept to and fro in stately measure. Huge broken masses of rock lay piled about the little channel, and the sea dashed at will at the foot of the exposed cliff, and through the submerged caverns below.

Errol Glendenning had fallen into an uneasy and feverish slumber. Nancette, cramped and chilled with long exposure to the elements, still supported his head in her lap. Basil was restlessly walking to and fro and endeavouring to discover some sign of their boat amongst the *débris* of rock, and

seaweed, and shingle, where the birds fluttered like a living cloud.

As the day grew clearer his anxiety deepened. The steamer lay off at some distance from the dreaded island; if the boat had been swept away he knew it would be impossible to regain it, and the superstitious sailors might refuse to launch another and search for the missing passengers. He said nothing to Nancette, except that he was going to seek the boat, and then slowly and cautiously made his way down the slippery rocks to the base of the cliffs. He had not proceeded far before he stopped in horror. That strange, cathedral-like vault, where the water had flowed so dark and deep, had been broken up and almost destroyed. The sea foamed, and fretted, and eddied through the passage, completely stopping the outlet he had used, and the entrance to the cave from the cliffs. The boat must have been washed away or dashed to pieces—he saw that at

once, and the uselessness of attempting to reach the ridge of rocks below.

He took in the full peril of the situation. Approach to the island, in the state in which it now was, was almost impossible ; yet here they must remain prisoners until someone from the steamer made the attempt to rescue them. Suddenly he remembered the cave. At least they might find food and shelter there. He resolved to enter it by the path by which they had escaped the inundation, and cautiously made his way back again to where Nancette still kept her vigil of sorrow and of grief.

He hastily explained to her what he was about to do. She only begged him to bring some of the skins and rugs with him for Errol to lie on. All her thoughts now were centred on the helpless being who lay stretched at her feet, unconscious of the love and care and bitter remorse that thrilled her tender heart.

Basil hurried in. He made his way down the incline without difficulty, but after a while the way grew dark and slippery. The water must have flooded all the cave to have risen so high, and as he cautiously advanced step by step, he could hear it tumbling and tossing at his feet. He stopped, and tried to strain his eyes into the black gulf beyond. Gradually he caught sight of masses of white foam, that seemed floating to and fro on a waste of waters, and he realized at last that the cave must be entirely flooded, and it would be perilous, if not impossible, to advance any farther. As he stood there, hesitating and uncertain, he felt the water touch his feet with the sudden swell of an advancing wave. He bent down and looked over the dark and foam-streaked surface. As he did so, something cold and strange swept against his face. He grasped it by an unaccountable impulse. It was a woman's hair.

With a shudder of horror, he drew it into his grasp, and the swell of an upheaving wave lent its assistance to his efforts. A dead and heavy weight it was that he dragged out of the trough of waters. Once he felt dry earth beneath his feet, he stooped and touched the face. It was icy cold. His hands wandered on. They met the powerless hands of what he felt was a corpse ; but, even as he recognised who and what this must be, he found, to his horror, that the dead hand clutched in its tenacious grasp the arm of a man.

There was no light to see the faces, but he guessed instinctively that the grasp of hate had dragged Pierre de Volens to his doom, and meted out the justice that so long he had escaped.

Leaving the two bodies out of reach of the water, he once more emerged into the light of day.

Something must be done. The steamer must be signalled. He moved past Nan-

cette. She was too spent and exhausted now to question him.

He tore off his neckcloth, and knotted his handkerchief to it, and then, climbing to the highest point of this isolated headland, he set his signal flying. He had not much hope, but he knew the pilot would be wondering what had become of his passengers, and trusted that he would have sense enough to guess that something was amiss, and send a boat to their rescue.

He was faint and exhausted with hunger, and watching, and anxiety ; but he cheered his drooping energies by reflecting that again his good luck had sent him to the rescue of his Lady Nancye in the most critical hour of her life, and that it behoved him to act as befitted the champion of an advanced order of chivalry.

Hour after hour passed on. The sun was high in the heavens, the birds screamed and

flew over the wide blue waters, and still that little group remained, unmoved and unnoticed, upon that desolate spot.

Towards noon, Nancette sank into a state of insensibility, and Errol Glendenning grew more feverish and restless. Basil felt almost desperate. He knew that another night of exposure and privation would be fatal to Nancette's delicate frame and to Errol Glendenning's precarious condition.

At last, when he had signalled until hope had almost died out of his breast, he heard a loud shout from below. Summoning all his strength, he answered it, and, after what seemed an interminable time, two sailors made their way up the steep sides of the cliff, and he knew that rescue was at hand. Then the full sense of all he had gone through came upon him, even as he recognised that danger was over at last.

With a faint cry of joy and relief, he sank back in the arms of the stalwart sailor-lad

who had volunteered for the search, and, for the first time in his life, lost consciousness of everything and everyone, including his bright and boyish self.

When Basil Glendenning again awoke to the fact of life and reason, it was to find Myra Freere beside him.

He raised himself by an effort, and looked round the room wonderingly.

'Have I been ill?' he asked. 'And Nan-cette—where is she?'

'She is safe. Do not fear for her,' answered Mrs. Freere.

And as the boy looked at her, he fancied there was some great and subtle change about her. She seemed worn, and pale, and old; and her mouth had a hard, almost stern look about it that was altogether strange. He sank back on his pillows, surprised at his own weakness.

'If she is all right, I don't care about any-

thing else,' he said, with his usual frankness. 'But what have you been doing to yourself?'

'I have had a sad and anxious time,' she said almost sternly. 'Your guardian has been at the point of death, and Nancette also has been very ill. The shock and exposure and cold were too much for her delicate frame. I used to wonder sometimes which of them would leave us first.'

'But now,' he said eagerly—'now?'

'The danger is past,' she answered; 'they are both convalescent. You have taken longer to come round; you have had a narrow escape of brain fever.'

He lay there quietly for some moments, his thoughts busy with memories and conjectures.

'It will be all right now, won't it?' he said at last. 'That scoundrel is dead, you know.'

'It is all right,' she said calmly; 'for Errol heard the whole story from his enemy's

own cowardly lips. There is not a cloud between them now.'

'I wonder,' said Basil thoughtfully, 'what brought him to the cave that night.'

'I think,' she said, with a shudder, 'that he meant to kill the strange being who had the misfortune to be his wife. Finding himself confronted by Errol, he changed his mind, and fired at him. He has had a narrow escape,' she added, her lips growing pale with an emotion that was too strong for repression.

Again Basil was busy with reflection.

'So Léonie is an orphan,' he said at last. 'Mr. Glendenning ought to adopt her.'

Myra Freere looked at him, amazed.

'Adopt the child of his bitterest foe!' she exclaimed. 'You have strange ideas, Basil.'

'It is not her fault,' the boy answered calmly. 'I shall suggest it.'

‘I would,’ said Myra ironically. ‘It will be a pleasant surprise.’

‘It seems to me,’ said Basil, looking gravely at her, ‘that you are not quite as nice as you used to be. But no doubt sick-nursing is trying.’

She met his eyes, and a little odd smile hovered about her lips for a moment. Then suddenly, without sign or warning, she burst into a passion of bitter weeping.

Basil was alarmed.

‘Dear Mrs. Freere,’ he entreated, ‘please don’t mind me. I’m always putting my foot in it. You surely don’t think I meant to offend you.’

She began to laugh almost hysterically.

‘You must not notice me,’ she said brokenly, ‘I am weak and easily upset. This has been a very trying time for me.’

‘It must have been,’ said the boy, with keen self-reproach. ‘Where is Nancette now?’

'With her—husband,' she answered, her voice faltering and unsteady. 'It is their hour of reconciliation; they have touched happiness at last.'

Again that sense of something strange and hard about her puzzled the boy. Could it be possible that in some way she envied Nancette?

Her face was quite colourless, her eyes were dim, and her figure had a weary, tired droop, as if it lacked the strength to support itself with the old queenly grace.

Suddenly she sank down on a chair beside his bed. He noticed that she was trembling greatly.

'I am very tired,' she said. 'I have been worried and anxious; and now that all danger is over, I feel it has cost me more than I fancied.'

Basil looked at her with grave, intent eyes.

'Do you remember once, at Owl's Roost,

saying that the day that reconciled Errol Glendenning and his wife would be the happiest of your life ?' he asked at last.

She drew a sudden, sharp breath.

'Yes,' she said.

'Then it has come ?' he went on gently.

The strangest smile that ever crossed mortal lips hovered for a second round that sad, pale mouth of hers.

'Yes,' she said in a whisper ; 'it has—come. They are happy at last.'

'And you ?' he questioned involuntarily.

'I feel,' she said, 'as if I had come to the end of a long task, and I don't like the prospect of the empty days before me.'

'Oh,' he said cheerfully, 'no doubt there are plenty more unhappy people who would be glad of a friend, if that is all.'

She lifted her face. It looked blank and cold.

'I dare say you are right,' she said. 'I will do my best to find them.'

'It has all ended well,' he went on heedlessly; 'a sort of general retribution. The villain of the play is dead, and so, thank goodness! is that female wizard of the sea. My Ladye Nancye will be happy, so will Mr. Glendenning. I suppose the old French party won't trouble us any more; there only remains Léonie.'

'You are troubled about Léonie,' said Myra Freere coldly. 'I think you can safely leave her to the consolations of Greek and Euclid.'

He laughed—a weak little laugh, that surprised himself.

'Do you know,' he said, 'I feel really tired. I should like to go to sleep, if you won't think me rude. Why don't you have a nap also? That looks a comfortable chair, and no doubt Nancette won't be in a hurry to end the interesting interview. You look quite worn out.'

'I was wrong to let you talk so much,'

she said hurriedly. 'Certainly go to sleep, if you feel disposed, and I will sit here. You are the only invalid on my hands now.'

'You are very good,' he said drowsily. 'Errol always said that. I have wondered sometimes that he didn't marry—you.'

She made no answer, only sat there with cold, clasped hands, and lips as pale as death.

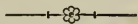
Those random words had struck to the very roots of her heart and life. Presently she dropped her face on her hands. The tears trickled slowly, one by one, between her trembling fingers.

Then softly the twilight shadows closed around her in the quiet evening hour, and she seemed to hear amidst the stillness the mocking echo of Basil's random words :

'The happiest day of your life.'

FINIS.

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